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TIBET
BON RELIGION

PER KVAERNE

INSTITUTE OF RELIGIOUS ICONOGRAPHY
STATE UNIVERSITY GRONINGEN

LEIDEN E. J. BRILL 1985



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ICONOGRAPHY OF RELIGIONS

EDITED BY

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SECTION XII: EAST AND CENTRAL ASIA

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LEIDEN
E. J. BRILL
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TIBET
BON RELIGION

A DEATH RITUAL
OF THE TIBETAN BONPOS

BY

PER KVAERNE

With 48 Plates



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"The living must explain to the deceased and get rid of his suffering"

[Snellgrove 1967, 118-119]

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FOREWORD

This book would not have been possible without the help, patience and interest of the Reverend Sangye Tenzin Jongdong, Abbot of the Bonpo Monastery in India, who gave me permission to photograph the death ritual as performed by him on October 13th, 1981. I take this opportunity of expressing my deep gratitude to him as well as to all the monks of the Bonpo Monastery for their hospitality during the autumn of 1981.

I also want to thank Jon Jerstad, who took most of the photos during the ritual. Axel Ström, Markus Aksland and Geir Eriksen likewise contributed photos from our stay in the monastery. Other photos have been placed at my disposal by Martin Brauen and Priscilla Ellis. The Musée Guimet in Paris graciously permitted the photography of one of the Bonpo thankas from its Tibetan collections, and I am particularly grateful to Gilles Béguin for his helpfulness. Martin Brauen also kindly lent me his copy of the Tibetan text which is recited during the ritual. Parts of that text are translated on the following pages. My warm thanks to all.

Last but not least, I owe a special debt of gratitude to Samten Gyaltsen Karmay, without whose help many difficulties in connection with the translation of the Tibetan texts would have remained unsolved, and to Anne-Marie Blondeau, who read my manuscript and offered many valuable suggestions and corrections. The errors and imperfections which remain are, needless to say, entirely my own.

Per Kvaerne

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The following Tibetan texts are concerned with the ritual of the *byang-bu* (see p. 12 below), i.e. the ritual to be described on the following pages. They were composed by Shes-rab dgongs-rgyal (= bSod-nams blo-gros) who was born in 1784 and became abbot of sMan-ri in 1810, after he had received them as an auditive revelation (*snyan-rgyud*) from Shes-rab rgyal-mtshan (1356-1415), the founder of the lineage of abbots of sMan-ri.

I use an edition without date published in Delhi in the late 1960's. In accordance with Tibetan usage, the texts are referred to as KA, KHA and GA respectively.

KA	Du-tri-su'i sgrib-sbyong-gi sgrub-gzhung ma-rig mun-sel sgron-me 'khor-ba ngan-song dong-sprugs	34 fols.
KHA	Tshe-'das-kyi gsur-bsngo snang-ba'i 'dod-dgu gter-mdzod (the fols. are numbered 1,2; thereafter, continuing the pagination from KA, 37; thereafter the pages are not numbered, but are marked *Du-tri-su gtad-ya*)	9 fols.
GA	Du-tri-su sgrib-sbyong sgrub-gzhung-las g.yung-drung sa-bcur bgrod-pa'i smon-lam	5 fols.

A brief excerpt, dealing with mortuary rites and beliefs, from the *gZi-brjid* has been edited and translated by D. L. Snellgrove [Snellgrove 1967, 116-123]. The basic pattern of the rites as outlined in the *gZi-brjid* is the same as that described here.

There are a fair number of corresponding passages and expressions in the *gZi-brjid* and the above texts, but limitations of space do not allow a further discussion of these in the present volume.

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that the Bonpos of Tibet possess an extensive and complex iconography. As early as 1922 Johan van Manen published a description of a Bon image [van Manen 1922], and in recent years a few examples of Bonpo iconography have been published and described [e.g. Kvaerne 1977A; Lauf 1975, 175-187; Lauf 1979, 186-201].

At the same time, a vast iconographic material is now available: in private and public collections, among the Bonpos in India and Nepal, and, finally, to an as yet unknown extent, in Tibet itself. Further, the literature of the Bonpos is rapidly becoming accessible; several hundred volumes have already been published in India, and descriptions of deities, particularly in ritual texts, abound.

Most of this material still awaits systematic study. Hence I have had to make a choice of either providing a broad but necessarily sketchy survey of Bonpo iconography as a whole, or concentrating on a smaller sector while aiming at a reasonable degree of completeness as far as that sector is concerned. I have opted for the latter course. Hence the following description is of a particular ritual which may be styled a "death ritual" and which I have had the opportunity of witnessing; and the iconography which will be presented is that which enters into this particular death ritual.

One of the consequences of this approach is that I have not been guided by aesthetic considerations in my choice of illustrations. I shall reproduce and describe those iconographic pieces which have actually been used in the course of the ritual in question, although I shall supplement this by certain other paintings, mainly such as are in the possession of Tibetan Bonpos in India. As attention will be focused on the ritual function of the iconography, illustrations showing various stages of the ritual will be fairly numerous.

Even with these limitations, the iconography presented can only be said to have been dealt with in a summary and superficial manner. For example, I have only used such textual material as actually enters into the ritual; a considerable number of *sādhanas* (texts describing the iconographically correct visualization of deities for meditative and ritual purposes) concerning most of the deities dealt with here, could have been assembled. Only in one case, that of the 'Six Subduing gShen', have I given references to variant forms found in other sources (see p. 20). This I have done in order to give at least one indication of the kind of variety, even freedom, which is characteristic of Bonpo—indeed, of Tibetan—iconography in general. I have avoided entering into historical questions as far as iconography is concerned; to do so would have been impossible in this small volume. However, I have devoted two chapters to presenting the Bonpo religion and the Bonpo death rituals in historical perspective as most readers will probably not be too familiar with these matters, and also because this historical background determines much of the interest which present-day rituals and iconography of the Bonpos provides for the historian of religions.

CHAPTER ONE

WHO ARE THE BONPOS ?

To the Tibetans, Tibet is in a unique sense the Land of Religion, the land in which the Good Law has flourished for centuries in accordance with a prophecy made by the Buddha himself. Accordingly the Tibetans designate themselves—as well as others, especially Mongols, who practice the Tibetan form of Buddhism—*nang-pa*, "insiders", as opposed to all other peoples who are *phyi-pa*, "outsiders". All this is well known. It is, however, less well known that there are in fact two distinct religions in Tibet. Besides Buddhism, which Tibetans call *chos* (a word which translates the Indian term *dharma*, "law, doctrine"), there exists another religion, called *bon*, its adherents being styled *bon-po* ("adherents of Bon").[1]

The term *bon-po* originally designated a priest within the pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet. This religion is frequently referred to as "shamanism", a term which is, however, misleading. Judging from the oldest sources, contemporary with the introduction of Buddhism (7th-9th centuries A.D.), an important if not the chief function of the *bon-po* priests seems to have been connected with the funeral rites of the kings and the subsequent cult which took place at the burial mound. This cult was apparently extremely complicated; we shall return to certain aspects of it, but for the moment at least note that we do not seem to find any indication of what might be called "shamanistic" elements. There is no indication of trances of any kind; on the contrary, the cult was entirely ritualistic, strictly regulated down to the smallest detail, its efficacity depending on the correct performance of each element. An important part in the rituals of this religion was played by the sacrifice of various animals, a fact to which we shall return.

Recent research indicates that the pre-Buddhist religion was referred to not only as *bon*, but also as *gtsug* (both words of uncertain etymology), and that other priests were active besides the *bon-po*, especially a class of priests known as *gshen*, a word probably meaning "sacrificer" [Snellgrove/Richardson 1968, 52].

Now, although it is clear that many elements of this ancient religion survived the introduction of Buddhism—which bitterly condemned and gradually succeeded in abolishing such practices as animal and human sacrifice—and became a part of a broad religious substratum, finding expression in many kinds of popular religious beliefs and practices, yet with the triumph of Buddhism the *bon-po* of the royal period disappeared as an organised body of priests.

What causes confusion, however, is the fact that in the 11th century, if not before, a religion appears on the scene, styling itself *bon* and its adherents *bon-po* (hereafter referred

[1] There is an increasing number of books and articles about *bon* and the Bonpos. In addition to Blondeau 1976, Snellgrove/Richardson 1968, and Stein 1973, the following may be mentioned: Karmay, S.G., "A General Introduction to the History and Doctrines of Bon", *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko*, No. 33, Tokyo 1975, pp. 171-218; Lienhard, S., "Bon-Religion", *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Band VII, Berlin 1981, pp. 42-48; Skorupski, T., "Tibetan g-Yung-Drung Monastery at Dolanji", *Kailash* 8 (1981), pp. 25-43.

to as Bonpo), but manifestly not identical with the ancient faith. In fact, not only does this religion appear simultaneously with various Buddhist schools introduced from India—the bKa'-rgyud-pa, the Sa-skya-pa, and so on—but as far as doctrine and practice is concerned, it is frequently difficult, from the point of view of comparative religion, to discern any really significant differences between *bon* and *chos*. To their respective followers, the two terms *bon* and *chos* simply designate the Doctrine (bstan-pa) with the associated ideas of Law, Truth, Reality etc. The concepts of *karman*, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, Awakening, suffering, and so on are basic ideas for Bonpos as well as for Buddhists.[2] That this is so, may be illustrated by the Bonpo version of the "Wheel of Existence" (I), which implies precisely these concepts [Kvaerne 1981B]. "The "Wheel of Existence" may also be taken as the general cosmological framework within which the drama of the death ritual is acted.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the Bonpos regard themselves as forming a distinct religion, and are also thus regarded by the Buddhists. And in a fundamental respect they are quite opposed: while Buddhists ultimately derive the authority of their doctrine from the Indian Śākyamuni, the Bonpos deny that he was the Buddha, the Awakened One. They maintain instead that the true Buddha of our cosmic period was a prince called sTon-pa-gshen-rab, "The Teacher, Supreme gShen", who lived long before Śākyamuni, in the land of sTag-gzig situated somewhat vaguely to the west of Tibet. sTon-pa-gshen-rab is held to have propagated *bon* throughout the world, and later on the Doctrine of *bon* was introduced, so the Bonpos assert, into Tibet via a country styled Zhang-zhung, situated, roughly, between sTag-gzig and Tibet. It was this Doctrine of *bon*, so the later (post-11th century) Bonpo tradition insists, that was suppressed by the kings who favoured Buddhism.

Accordingly, the later Bonpo sources manifest a deep antagonism to *chos*, the doctrine which under royal patronage was brought from India to Tibet. Thus a 19th-century Bonpo scholar, Nyi-ma-bstan-'dzin, has this to say concerning the introduction of *chos*:

> "In the Earth-Ox Year (749 A.D.), the perverse prayer of a demon (being the ultimate cause) and he who acted like a monk but retained the Five Poisons (i.e. Śāntarakṣita) providing the immediate cause of the (appearing of the) pernicious Buddhist monks, a demon having entered the heart of the king and the merit of the realm of Tibet being low, the time came when the sun of the Doctrine (i.e. *bon*) was made to set". [Kvaerne 1971, 227].

It is indeed startling to see the appearance of Buddhism described as a catastrophe by an author who is in every other respect profoundly "Buddhist".

The actual prehistory of the Bonpos, emerging in the 11th century as one among several religious schools, is still obscure. Their immediate origins are, however, certainly to be found in the same religious "underground" of village tantrists and errant yogins, appropriating whatever doctrines appealed to them, that formed the basis of the Nyingmapa school. There is a very clear and profound relationship between the post-11th century Bonpos and the Nyingmapas, both schools tracing their history back to the crucial period

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[2] I will make use of such terms as *saṃsāra*, *karman*, etc. where the corresponding Tibetan is employed by Buddhists and Bonpos alike, as these Sanskrit words enjoy wide familiarity in the West. In all fairness it should be stated that the Bonpos would not accept an Indian origin of these concepts, but regard them as an integral part of *bon*. In other cases, where there exists concepts which are more or less functionally identical in *bon* as well as Buddhism, but where the Bonpos use special terms, I either retain the Bonpo term, or translate it (e.g. *sems-dpa'*, corresponding to the Buddhist *bodhisattva*, is rendered 'Spiritual Hero').

of the introduction of Buddhism. Nevertheless, the connection between the post-11th century Bonpos and the ancient *bon-po* priests, while not a case of unbroken continuity, is, on the other hand, not an entirely baseless claim on the part of the Bonpos, who have preserved too many ancient beliefs and practices for such a radical discontinuity to appear likely.

As the Nyingmapas did with Padmasambhava, so the Bonpos developed a complete mythology and religious cult of sTon-pa-gshen-rab who was also regarded as the author of a vast mass of literature—most of it, again as with the Nyingmapas, being of the *gter-ma*, "Treasure", type, ultimately organised into a special Bonpo Kanjur and Tenjur [Kvaerne 1974].

Bonpo religious centres—like those of the Nyingmapas—were to begin with very modest, being hermitages and temples supported by local family lineages neither seeking nor obtaining political power. Several such family lineages are known; traditionally those of gShen, Bru, Zhu and rMe'u are enumerated, and several of these have continued until to-day. Thus the Bonpos were left in peace as a small and, from the point of view of the Buddhists, aberrant school, more often ignored than explicitly tolerated.

By the 15th century, however, the Bonpos were organising their monastic life along the same lines as the Buddhist schools. The foremost figure in this connection was Shes-rab-rgyal-mtshan (1356-1415) who founded the monastery of sMan-ri in Thob-rgyal in gTsang in 1405 [Kvaerne 1970; Kvaerne 1977B]. The abbots of sMan-ri (who succeeded each other by vote, not by reincarnation or family lineage) were thenceforth regarded as the spiritual heads of the Bonpos. In 1834 the monastery of g.Yung-drung-gling was founded, likewise in gTsang, and the abbot of that monastery now took over the religious leadership. Both these monasteries were flourishing institutions, housing several hundred monks in 1959. Other Bonpo monasteries existed in eastern Tibet (Kham and Amdo). Lacking political power of any kind, the Bonpo monasteries seem to have been entirely dependent on the gifts of the lay people.

It has often been remarked by Western writers that the Bonpos perform certain ritual acts in the opposite manner of the Buddhists. Thus they turn their prayer-wheels towards the left instead of towards the right; they circumambulate holy objects in the same fashion; they recite different mantras, and the iconography and names of their deities are different from those of Buddhism. It is important to realise, however, that this is not, as has been so often asserted by Western writers, an expression of "wilful distortion or perversion", nor does the essence of their doctrine lie "largely in contradiction and negation". On the contrary, the Bonpos—exactly like the Buddhists—perform ritual acts as prescribed by their religion with the pious intention of eventually becoming "awakened" and with unquestioning faith in the Buddha (that the Buddha in the sense of the "Awakened One" in their view is sTon-pa-gshen-rab is another matter). Thus the Bonpos may be considered to be as "Buddhist" as any other Tibetans, while still maintaining to be, in a special sense, the upholders of the true religion of Tibet.

CHAPTER TWO

BONPO DEATH RITUALS

The historical study of such rituals can be approached in two ways. The first way is to study those rituals which were practised in Tibet before the introduction of Buddhism, or which continued to be practised after its introduction, in some cases only after having been subjected to a Buddhist interpretation.

The second way is historical in the perspective of the Bonpos' own understanding of history, i.e. it is the study of those death rituals which Bonpos believe were performed by sTon-pa-gshen-rab himself. Descriptions of such rituals may of course merely reflect practises prevalent in the period to which the texts in question may reasonably be ascribed; but they may also, at least in part, reflect more ancient practices. Here we are up against problems of chronology and of textual criticism and interpretation which we at present are not in a position to resolve satisfactorily.[3]

According to the later Buddhist sources, *gshen* or *bon-po* priests were invited from Zhang-zhung and Bru-sha (Gilgit) to Tibet precisely because they were experts on death rituals. The first Tibetan kings are described as semi-divine beings who did not leave corpses behind when they died, but ascended bodily (by means of a luminous rope) to heaven. This direct connection with a heavenly sphere was, however, broken by the death of king Gri-gum-btsan-po, who was tricked in the course of a duel with his minister into expelling the tutelary deities who resided on his shoulders, and thus his corpse remained on earth when he was killed. The *bon-po* summoned from Zhang-zhung ordered the construction of a tomb and performed the proper funerary rituals for the first time [Kvaerne 1981A].

Whatever the historical reality of this account, it is at least certain that the Tibetan kings were in fact buried in large funerary mounds, the remains of which still exist in the Yarlung valley in the southern part of central Tibet. This practice continued until the collapse of the Tibetan royal dynasty in the middle of the 9th century A.D., in other words, more than a hundred years after the introduction of Buddhism, and regardless of whether the king in question supported Buddhism or not.

The funerary rites occasioned by the death of a king were complex and by all accounts on a grand scale. Several ancient manuscripts describe them, but unfortunately much of the relevant terminology can not yet be understood. It is however clear that the rites largely consisted of offerings of food and various objects (clothes, jewelry, etc.) and that animals—sheep, yak, and horses—were sacrificed [Lalou 1952]. Thus the 7th-century king Srong-btsan-sgam-po promised to sacrifice a hundred horses at the tomb of a faithful minister. The rites were performed by *gshen* and *bon-po* priests who all had special tasks.

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[3] A brilliant and basic study of the cosmological ideas (and religious and political ideology) of the royal period is Macdonald, Ariane, "Une lecture des Pelliot tibétain 1286, 1287, 1038, 1047, et 1290. Essai sur la formation et l'emploi des mythes politiques dans la religion royale de Sroṅ-btsan sgam-po", *Études tibétaines dédiées à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou,* A. Macdonald (ed.), Paris 1971, pp. 190-391.

''It is remarkable that these funeral rites are thought of in a purely ritualistic manner, with a particularly strong emphasis on the order of performance and a meticulous regulation of details: not the least sign of trance is found in them on the part of any of the officiants'' [Stein 1975, 238].

The ancient Tibetan ideas concerning death and the hereafter are likewise known from a number of manuscripts found at Tun-huang. Although the texts in question present many difficulties and although many details are still far from clear, it is at least certain that the Tibetans believed in two regions of the dead: one was a land in which men and animals lived a continued life of joy and plenty, the other was a region of darkness and suffering. At the end of a world cycle, those who had spent their time in ''the land of joy'' would experience a resurrection to a new life in this world [Blondeau 1976, 243-244]. However, the way leading to ''the land of joy'' was long and full of obstacles; and for this reason the dead were dependent on the aid of the living through the performance of funerary rites, especially the sacrifice of the animals mentioned above, it being the task of these animals to remove all obstacles, guide the deceased, and serve as his mount on the dangerous way beyond death. Through their sacrifice the animals also served as a ''ransom'' to malignant spirits who might otherwise harm the deceased, in other words, they served as a substitute for him. Finally, while holding this belief in a ''land of joy'' which could be reached after death, the Tibetans apparently also believed that the dead needed all the various objects they had made use of in this life, and hence the sacrifice of animals may also be understood as a means of providing the dead with herds of yak and horses beyond the grave. Offerings of food, clothes, and precious objects may be understood in the same way. Human sacrifice—reported by Chinese sources, and also indicated by Tibetan documents—may have served to provide a ''ransom'' for the deceased, or to provide him with servants or companions, although the Chinese sources, which are not first-hand, may refer to practices earlier than the 7th century A.D. In any case, the idea that the deceased needed not only animal helpers and companions, but also a wide range of gifts was by all appearances an important one.

The importance of such rites and of beliefs concerning the after-life in general is demonstrated by the number of ancient texts directly or indirectly dealing with this subject, as well as with the closely related rites and myths of healing. We may infer from later sources that such ''ransoms'' were also offered in cases of illness if the life of the patient was considered to be in danger. Their importance is also attested by the fact that Buddhist polemics were above all directed towards such beliefs and practices. Not only was the slaughter of animals, ritual or otherwise, contrary to Buddhist ethics, but the very idea of the continued existence of the individual in a ''land of joy'', to be followed, ultimately, by new life on earth, was utterly incompatible with the Buddhist doctrine of the impermanence of the individual and the finality of *nirvāṇa*, i.e. of liberation from the round of birth, death, and rebirth in the world. Nevertheless, the very notion of *saṃsāra*, admitting as it did the possibility of rebirth in a better world than ours, provided a necessary point of contact with the indigenous religion; the ancient ''land of joy'' could easily be identified with the world of the gods as the highest of the six places of rebirth according to Buddhist cosmology. A Buddhist text which dates from around 800 A.D., apparently written by a Tibetan, makes conscious use of the symmetry, albeit superficial, of these concepts [Imaeda 1981].

When combating the ancient death rituals, Buddhist strategy was to retain at least part of the ancient terminology while systematically identifying it with Buddhist ideas, thus emptying it of its original content. This strategy was in the end so successful that by the 10th or 11th century the ancient beliefs outlined above had apparently been more or less forgotten by the Tibetans, although as we shall see, certain elements, now with a completely new significance, were preserved.

A well-known example from the later literary tradition of a refutation of the ancient beliefs may be found in the "Hundred Thousand Songs of Mi-la-ras-pa" (*Mi-la-ras-pa'i mgur-'bum*). While this collection of episodes from the life of the famous Tibetan yogin Mi-la-ras-pa dates from the 16th century, it may well preserve authentic material dating from the life of the yogin himself (1040-1123). In the episode in question, Mi-la-ras-pa, as a proponent of Buddhism, overcomes the Bonpo yogin Na-ro-bon-chung who until then had been the master of the holy mountain Kailasha in western Tibet. While Mi-la-ras-pa is staying in the neighbourhood of the holy mountain, a Bonpo layman falls ill, and preparations are made for a rite of healing in the course of which a hundred yak, a hundred goats, and a hundred sheep are to be sacrificed as a "ransom". Mi-la-ras-pa arrives at the spot just before the animals are to be slaughtered, and by showing the futility of the rite—the killing of living beings can only increase the guilt of the sick man—he succeeds in converting not only the patient, but his sons as well [Hoffmann 1950, 277-292]. What is of interest to note in the present context is that he accomplishes this task of conversion by presenting the new religion in the form of a "*bon* song" in which all the traditional ideas are interpreted as having in reality a Buddhist significance.

We now turn to the Bonpo tradition itself, i.e. to the texts belonging to the religion, styling itself *bon*, which, no matter what its ultimate origins may be, appears on the scene in the 11th century (if not earlier). As we have seen, the adherents of *bon* regard their religion as quite distinct from Buddhism, and it is also so regarded by other Tibetans. The history of the present-day Bonpos can be traced back without a break to the 11th century. At a certain point in this chronology, however, we are confronted with difficulties to which no satisfactory solution has presented itself as yet. On the one hand, both Buddhists and Bonpos claim that *bon* continues the faith of the pre-Buddhist *bon-po* priests—the Buddhists adding that by the 11th century the Bonpos had assimilated much of Buddhism by a process of simple plagiarism (this rather one-sided view tended to be accepted by Western scholars as well until the 1960's), the Bonpos insisting that their religion has been preserved through all vicissitudes (including the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet) ever since it was proclaimed by sTon-pa-gshen-rab thousands of years ago in the land of sTag-gzig.

The difficulty with both positions, Bonpo as well as Buddhist, is that the religious beliefs and practices which are actually associated with the *bon-po* priests in the early period of Tibetan history (i.e. the period up to the disintegration of the Tibetan empire in the middle of the 9th century A.D.) are fundamentally different from the basic conceptions of *bon* as it appears as an organised religion some two hundred years later.

Thus, while sTon-pa-gshen-rab does perform death rituals, the aim is not to secure happiness in a *post mortem* existence which in all essentials is a replica of life in this world, but—exactly as in Buddhism—the aim is liberation from the wheel of birth and death. When practices of a kind which correspond to the ancient Tibetan religion are referred to, they are described as ineffective and morally reprehensible—an instance being, as we shall see, the sacrifice of a human victim as a "ransom" for a sick person.

The most important source in this connection is the text entitled *gZer-mig*, an account of the life and deeds of sTon-pa-gshen-rab.[4] The *gZer-mig* may perhaps have been in existence as early as the 11th century [Karmay 1975, 562 n. 2], in which case the ritual practices described in it must be at least that old (though they may, of course, be older, as may parts of the text). In any case, the *gZer-mig* was in existence in its present form in the 14th century. [Blondeau 1971].

As early as 1950 H. Hoffmann drew attention to an episode in Chap. 9 of the *gZer-mig*. [Hoffmann 1950, 180]. A certain prince called Khri-shang falls ill and is on the point of dying. Sortilege is cast by a sooth-sayer (*mo-ma*), but to no avail. All the *bon-po* priests perform *gto*-rituals, likewise to no avail. The sooth-sayer then recommends that a boy, born at the same time as the prince, should be sacrificed as a 'ransom', as "his heart is like that of the prince". However, in order to perform the rite it is necessary to find a *bon-po* who knows how to offer ("send") someone as 'ransom' (*glud-du gtong shes-pa'i bon-po*). Such a *bon-po* is eventually found, and aided by a stupid beggar, "the black *gha-ha-dha*", the victim is bound to a kind of wooden cross; the sooth-sayer stretches out his legs, the *bon-po* seizes his arms, and the beggar slits open his chest and tears out his heart. Thereupon they scatter his flesh in all four directions. (IIa).

This rite perhaps approximates the practices of the pre-Buddhist period, although the role of the beggar suggests that the background of the story might be a period in which such rites were no longer approved of. However this may be, the point, as far as the *gZer-mig* is concerned, is that the rite not only is unsuccessful (the patient dies), but is the cause of a series of calamities: the officiants as well as the parents of the prince commit suicide, the parents of the victim kill the "black *gha-ha-dha*", and in the end a war ensues [Hoffmann 1961, 89-90].

In contrast to this rite, which the text considers both evil and ineffectual, is the rite which sTon-pa-gshen-rab performs in order to save the evil sooth-sayer, the *bon-po*, the beggar, and the parents of the prince from the evil rebirths to which their sinful acts have condemned them. In other words, he performs a death ritual. Offerings are arranged on two altars, and for each of the deceased a drawing of a human figure is prepared:

> "Thereafter, gShen-rab drew a human figure on white 'conch paper'. He wrote the letters of the 'Five Heroic Seeds' in the four corners and in the middle: YANG on the right foot, RAM on the left foot, KHANG on the right hand, SRUM on the left hand, and OṂ on the forehead. In the centre he wrote the names and families of those who were dead. He attached each drawing to a reed having three joints, and placed them between the two altars". (KA: 167a).[5]

Thereafter follows a lengthy invocation of a thousand deities, by means of which the persons in question are liberated from further suffering in hell.

In Chap. 5 of the same text, a similar ritual is described. A certain king by name of gTo-bu-dod-de dies after having led an evil and violent life. On his death-bed he repents and asks his subjects to invite sTon-pa-gshen-rab to the capital. When he dies he is reborn, as

[4] For further references concerning the *gZer-mig* (editions, translations, etc.) see Kvaerne 1974, 98, and Karmay 1972, 4 n. 1. The edition utilised for the present translations is the Delhi 1966 edition.

[5] The same passage has been translated by Helmut Hoffmann [Hoffmann 1950, 180]. My translation of the last sentence differs from his, as I understand it to refer to separate drawings (and rods) for each of the deceased.

he had foreseen, in hell; and it is from this state of suffering that sTon-pa-gshen-rab saves him by performing the appropriate ritual [Hoffmann 1961, 87-88]. The relevant passage merits translation in full:

> "In order to remove gTo-bu-dod-de's impurity of body, speech, and mind, they built a crystal stūpa of 'translators and scholars' with three pinnacles as the bodies of the God, the *gShen*, and the *Srid-pa*,[6] and decorated it with figures of various living beings—those that fly in the air, those that creep on the ground, and those that rove in the space between.[7] They arranged offering-cakes (*gtor-ma*) of many kinds of flesh and many kinds of blood.
> He (i.e. sTon-pa-gshen-rab) drew a human form on white 'conch paper' and inserted the name (*ming-byang*) of gTo-bu-dod-de in the centre. He wrote the letters of the 'Five Heroic Seeds' in the four corners and in the middle: YANG on the right foot etc. He attached the drawing to a reed having three joints.
> Thereafter gShen-rab said: "As gTo-bu-dod-de's impurities of body, speech, and mind must be removed, rMa-lo and g.Yu-lo are to begin by various kinds of music, they are to make offerings of various kinds of food, they are to 'send as ransom' various kinds of ritual items (*ya-stags*), they are to perform incessant circumambulations and prostrations! Thereby the impurity of gTo-bu-dod-de's sins of body will be removed.
> Yid-kyi-khye'u-chung[8] is to recite the names and let (the people) make prostrations to the names of the hundred divine *gshen* (*lha-gshen*) of the five great realms (*klong chen-po lnga*) produced by the 'Five Heroic Seeds'. Thereby the impurity of gTo-bu-dod-de's sins of speech will be removed.
> As for the fruit, the poison of his 'single mind' (*ñag-cig sems*)—if I myself, being his 'guiding Teacher', will resolve to meditate on a good thought and continually recite powerful spells, the fruit of gTo-bu-dod-de, the poison of his 'single mind', will thereby be removed." (KA: 59a).

A detail from a *thanka* showing this ritual performed by sTon-pa-gshen-rab is included among the plates (IIb).

These passages from the *gZer-mig* allow us to reach certain conclusions.

Firstly, the fact that the fundamental ideas of post-11th century *bon* are radically different from the pre-Buddhist beliefs of the Tibetans, as evidenced by the cult connected with the royal tombs and by certain manuscripts originating from Tun-huang, is indirectly confirmed by the *gZer-mig* itself through its condemnation of the activities of the *bon-po* in Chap. 9. Hence the problem of the ultimate origin of the Bonpo religion probably cannot be solved simply by positing a process of adaptation and assimilation of Buddhist ideas.

Secondly, in the Bonpo world-view, man's fate depends on his actions in this life. Rebirth may take place within any of the six spheres of being, exactly as in Buddhism. However, one may be saved from such painful destinies and be led to final liberation by ritual means, as illustrated in the episodes presented above. By performing the ritual, sTon-pa-gshen-rab has imparted to it sacrality and vouched for its efficacity. As far as the Bonpos are concerned, it is this fact which legitimizes the ritual. In fact, most of its elements as described in the *gZer-mig* may be found in the ritual as it is actually performed to-day, so we now turn to a presentation of a contemporary Bonpo death ritual.

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[6] On this triad, see below, p. 20 sqq.
[7] There follows a sentence: *spu-mtshan mang-po sems-can kha-la btsugs* of which the literal translation, suggested to me by Anne-Marie Blondeau, could be "They fixed (traced?) many marks of hair on the snout of (these) living beings".
[8] Together with rMa-lo and g.Yu-lo one of the chief disciples of sTon-pa-gshen-rab.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SETTING

The ritual which we shall now describe took place on October 13th 1981 in the Tibetan Bonpo community in Himachal Pradesh in India. This community consists of a village of some eighty households and a monastery, situated above the village, with about one hundred inmates. (III a,b). About thirty are adult monks, many of them fully ordained (*drang-srong*); an equal number are younger men, attending the eight-year monastic school in order to obtain the degree of *dge-bshes* (which is an academic degree, and not an ordination). Some forty boys live in the monastery as novices under the personal care of the Abbot. Most of the adults, monks as well as laymen, are refugees from various parts of Tibet. The novices are partly recruited from the village or from other Tibetan refugee communities; however, in recent years many of them have come from areas in northern Nepal in which there is a Tibetan Bonpo population (Dolpo, Lubrak etc.).

The Abbot (*mkhan-po*) of the monastery, Sangye Tenzin Jongdong, is a native of Amdo (north-eastern Tibet). He was elected Abbot in 1968, and is regarded as continuing the sMan-ri lineage of abbots. (IV a). It is largely due to his determination and organisational talents that what was no more than a dream and a vision after the destruction of monastic life in Tibet, has turned into the reality of an active, tightly-knit monastic community. An equally important role is played by the Head Teacher (*slob-dpon*) of the monastic school, Tenzin Namdak, whose erudition and keen intellect has made the remarkably high scholarly standard of the monastery possible. (IV b).

The setting, then, is a monastery which is open to the needs of the local community of which it is a part, a centre of religious life for thousands of Bonpos in India and Nepal, and a place in which religious life is carried on faithfully along traditional lines.

The religious activities of the monks are, generally speaking, of two kinds. On the one hand, the scholastic studies and calendary festivals—for example, the days of the birth and of the death of sTon-pa-gshen-rab as well as of certain important lamas—are carried out by the monks without the lay people necessarily (or even ordinarily) being involved. On the other hand, the monks spend much time in performing rituals on behalf of individual lay families; depending on their nature, these rituals are carried out in the main temple of the monastery or in private homes, of which one room usually serves as a permanent chapel. Death rituals come in this latter category; they are commissioned by the relatives of the deceased, and are performed, usually by two or three monks, in the chapel of a private house.

The death rites consist of three separate divisions.

a) Immediately after death, *'pho-ba*, 'transference (of consciousness)', is performed by a monk. The purpose of this rite is to transfer the consciousness of the deceased to a transcendent realm beyond the round of birth and death. Thereafter a text of the *bar-do thos-grol* type (''liberation from the intermediate state by hearing'') is recited, in which the

consciousness of the deceased is guided and instructed in the successive confrontations it must undergo with peaceful as well as wrathful deities in the 'intermediate state' (*bar-do*). This recitation is continued for three days and nights by monks who relieve each other at certain intervals. The basic ideas of the texts which are recited in connection with these two rites are very similar to Buddhist conceptions. A survey of the iconography of certain Bonpo *bar-do* texts has been published by Detlef I. Lauf [Lauf 1975, 175-187].

b) Three days after death, a ritual is performed during which the consciousness of the deceased is led, step by step, to final liberation. It is this ritual which will be studied in detail in the present volume. It is characterised by the officiant holding up a series of ritual cards (*tsag-li*) in front of a drawing, called *byang-bu*, of the deceased, to which his consciousness has been summoned. Accordingly this ritual is called *byang-chog*, "the ritual of the *byang-bu*". It lasts for about two hours.

It may be noted that the *'pho-ba*, the *thos-grol*, and the *byang-bu* rituals all aim at achieving the final liberation of the deceased. Logically, it should be sufficient that only one of them be performed. However, death being almost universally regarded as a 'crisis' and the deceased for that reason susceptible to ritual influence, it is understandable that several rituals are employed and regarded—at least implicitly—as reinforcing rather than contradicting one another.

c) The third part of the death rites begins with the cremation of the corpse early the following morning. As the deceased is supposed to have already obtained final liberation, the cremation as well as the following rituals are not performed for his benefit, but are pious acts, the merit of which in principle is dedicated to all living beings, and hence, through the very altruism of this intention, benefits the lay people who commission the monks to perform it. Thus, after the cremation, the so-called *klong-rgyas* ("extended vastness") ritual is performed in the course of which a thousand Buddhas are invoked. The prototype of this ritual is found in Chap. 14 of the *gZer-mig*, and is of the same nature as the invocation of a thousand Buddhas referred to above in connection with Chap. 9, or the recitation in Chap. 5 of the names of a hundred 'divine *gshen*' by means of which gTo-bu-dod-de's speech was purified. The *klong-rgyas* and related rituals can be performed at other occasions than death, being general merit-making rituals.

The ritual which is to be described was occasioned by the death of a layman on October 10th, 1981, and was performed on the request of his relatives by the Abbot assisted by two monks. The 'ritual of the *byang-bu*' was also filmed in 1972 by Martin Brauen, and short descriptions published in 1977 and 1978 [Brauen 1978; Brauen/Kvaerne 1978]. The ritual performed in 1972 was for the benefit of three persons (we have seen a precedent for this in Chap. 9 of the *gZer-mig*), two of whom had died some time before the ritual was actually performed.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RITUAL

The ritual takes place in the home of the deceased. A small room, c. 3 × 3 m, is turned into a chapel, and the corpse placed in a corner, behind a cotton screen (V). The Abbot and two monks officiate. They accompany the recitation of the appropriate text with drum, flat-bell (*gshang*) [Helffer 1981], conch, and cymbals. (VI a,b).

The ritual begins with the offering of a 'ransom' (*glud*). This has the form of a small figure of dough in the shape of a man, representing the deceased. (VII, VIII a, b). Holding it in his hands the Abbot offers it to the malignant spirits which might otherwise threaten the success of the ritual. (IX a). The following is recited:

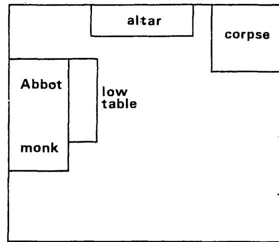


Figure 1

> "*OṂ*! By the power of the divine multitude of Blessed Ones[9] and of my own concentration (*ting-'dzin*), spellls (*sngags*), and gestures (*phyag-rgya*), may each sentient being in this visible world (which is like) a divine palace, be blessed with the fulfilment of every wish and every enjoyment that can be imagined.
>
> In order that the pollution of the sins of sentient beings steeped in ignorance may be cleansed, may all demons who produce hindrances and lead astray take this ransom-offering as a retribution they desire. May each return satisfied to his own abode!" (KA 15a-b).

The *glud* is then carried out of the house and thrown away (IX b); hence it is known as *glud-gtor* (lit. 'scattered ransom'). Small offering-cakes, made of dough, are likewise disposed of (*gtor-ma*). As all the demons may not have left voluntarily, the recitation then continues:

> "*BSVO*! Listen, all demons who produce hindrances and lead astray! In order that the pollution of beings may be cleansed and that they may proceed on the path to Liberation, do not remain here, great life-snatching, vitality-cutting red demons, but go each to your own abode!

[9] I follow David L. Snellgrove in translating *bder-gshegs* as "Blessed One" [Snellgrove 1967], instead of using—as is usual—the Sanskrit *sugata*, thus avoiding Buddhist connotations.

If you do not depart, but remain here, then from the immutable void of the Absolute Sphere (*bon-sku*) (will surge forth) the lord of all the Blessed Ones gathered together (who are) the Body of Enjoyment, (the lord having the form of) the Body of Apparition, the great 'Chief of Wrathful Deities' (*Khro-rgyal*), having a frightening appearance: blueish-black, nine heads, eighteen arms hurling various weapons like rain—he will grind the demons to dust''. (KA: 156).

The basic idea of this part of the ritual—that of offering a 'ransom'—is also, on the level of 'popular religion', well-known in a Buddhist context, e.g. in connection with rites of communal purification, and perpetuates beliefs which form a part of the pre-Buddhist religion. However, the invocation of a fierce deity, Khro-rgyal, is an obvious tantric element which, together with the idea of 'Three Bodies', has here been fully integrated with the idea of 'ransom'.

It is now possible to summon the deceased (X, XII a). In strictly doctrinal terms, it is, among the five 'aggregates' which constitutes a 'person', the 'consciousness' (*rnam-shes*, corresponding to Sanskrit *vijñāna*) which is summoned. This is, as we shall see, made clear in the text which is recited at this point. The 'summoning of the consciousness' (*rnam-shes 'gugs-pa*) is, like the offering of a 'ransom', a common ritual technique in Tibet which is used in connection with serious illness, and may also be called *bla-'gugs*, ''summoning the soul (*bla*)'', or *tshe-'gugs*, ''summoning the life (*tshe*)'' [Lessing 1976, 31]. Sickness and death are similar conditions, characterised by the absence of the 'soul', and require similar remedial techniques. The text goes on as follows:

''From the luminous mind of oneself (imagined as) sTon-pa-gshen-rab a white syllable *A*, white like the morning star (*rgya-skar*) and having the syllable *DZA* (attached beneath it like) tassels, shines forth and descends (in the form of) a dark red syllable *RNRI*, wherever it (i.e. the consciousness) may be staying in the intermediate state. Like the feather of a bird on the top of a pass it is drawn, powerless to go there (i.e. to the intermediate state), by the hook of compassion towards oneself with the thought that it should merge into the 'body-tablet' (*gzugs-kyi byang-bu*).'' (KA: 16a).

We note that the officiant is identified with sTon-pa-gshen-rab, and that the syllable *A* (XIa) is that of the gods. The syllable *RNRI* is based on Sanskrit *nṛ*, ''man'', and its colour, dark-red, is the colour of passion, characteristic of humans. This passage ends with the mention of the *byang-bu*, the 'tablet', with which we are already familiar from the passages of the *gZer-mig* translated above. The *byang-bu*, of which the central element is a stereotyped drawing of the deceased (XIb), now becomes the seat of the consciousness, its 'body' so to speak (we note that it is in fact called *gzugs-kyi byang-bu*, 'body-tablet'), and the presence of the deceased is now as real as that of the living. Thus, although the corpse, as we have seen, has been placed in the room and remains there as long as the ritual lasts, it is not the focus of interest, and the idea of 'consciousness' or 'soul' is no longer associated with it. The recitation which follows concludes with an enumeration of the various elements of which the *byang-bu* consists, and which are shown on Fig. 2.

''*A*! O you who now are dead, fortunate son of a noble family! By the power of the delusion of former passions you are now roaming in the intermediate state and experiencing innumerable sufferings. Now listen to me with unwavering attention! Now, by the compassion of the Buddha, I am your guiding teacher, so listen to what I, your teacher, am about to say!

You who now are dead have been summoned with your impurities from the realm of the intermediate state. You have merged with this unclean 'name-tablet' (*mtshan-byang*).[10] The substances (*rgyu*) which do not merge with the unclean 'name-tablet' (i.e. of which it is visibly composed) are:

the yellow 'golden face', support of the bodily form (*sku*),
the whitish-grey 'name-tablet', support of the speech (*gsung*),
the 'unclean garment', support of the physical body (*lus*),
the 'three-notched bamboo rod', support of the vital-force (*srog*),
the bright mirror, support of the mind (*yid*)." (KA: 162a-b).

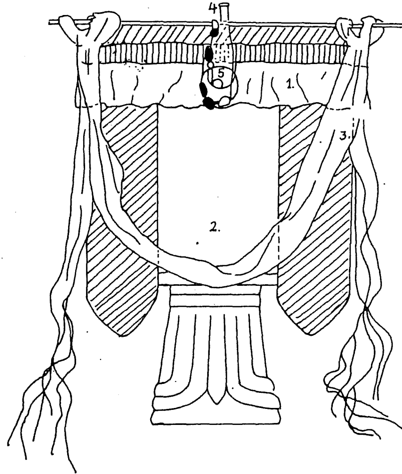


Figure 2

1. the 'golden face' — covering cloth
2. the 'name-tablet' — drawing of the deceased
3. the 'garment' — a ceremonial scarf
4. the bamboo rod
5. the 'mirror' — a small brightly polished metal disc.

(Drawing by Martin Brauen)

[10] The term *dri-ma mtshan-byang*, which I have translated "unclean name-tablet", presents several difficulties. *mTshan-byang* certainly refers to the entire *byang-bu*, the elements of which are enumerated in the following line of the text. *Dri-ma*, lit. "smell", I take to indicate "unpleasant smell". The expression *dri-ma* recurs in the third element of the *mtshan-byang*, viz. the *na-bza' dri-ma*, lit. "garment (characterised by) smell". In the actual ritual this "garment" is in fact a *kha-btags*, a white ceremonial scarf draped over the *byang-bu*. However, it is likely that this at some point of time in the past was a piece of clothing belonging to the deceased (which would explain the reference to "smell"). Such practices are in fact attested from Sikkim and Nepal, cf. Stein 1970, 185 n. 61 for references, and especially Macdonald, Alexander, *Essays on the ethnology of Nepal and South Asia*, Kathmandu 1975, pp. 153-156. David L. Snellgrove, translating the 14th century Bonpo text *gZi-brjid*, translates *dri-ma* (in the same context as the present) as "smell (viz. used garments)" [Snellgrove 1967, 121], and "clothes" [ibid., 123]. Further research is necessary before the uncertainties connected with this terminology are clarified.

There follows an aspersion (*khrus-gsol*) of the *byang-bu*, i.e. of the body of the deceased, with lustral water (XIIb).

> "Obeisance! Just as body, speech, and mind become pure by the washing of the body, speech, and mind of the Buddhas, having obtained nine kinds of miraculously-formed water and sweet-smelling medicinal herbs and incense, may (likewise) all passions and pollutions of living beings be purified!
> By washing him who now is dead and has abandoned his physical body (which is a carrier) of impurities, with the river of the Five Wisdoms, the five poisons of the impurities and the pollution of passions are purified—so may he see the Clear Light of the Five Great Wisdoms and the faces of the five bodies of the five gods!" (KA: 16b-17a).

Next, two series of 'seed-syllables (*'bru*) are written on the *byang-bu*. The first series, consisting of six syllables, represents the six classes of living beings in *saṃsāra*, in other words, the states of suffering from which the ritual is intended to rescue the deceased. The six syllables are: *THU*, signifying hell; *TRI*—tormented spirits; *SU*—animals; *NA*—men; *KA*—demigods; and *SO*—gods. The second series consists of the so-called 'Five Heroic Syllables' (*dpa'-bo 'bru lnga*) which, as we have seen, are mentioned in the *gZer-mig*. They represent the antidote, so to speak, of the six states of the round of birth and death:[11]

> "*A*! O present fortunate son of a good family! The six seed-syllables which are on the six points of your physical frame are the seeds of the six classes (of beings) of *saṃsāra* , so the sufferings of the six classes attack you.
> (However,) on your head, hands and feet are the seeds of the Five Heroic Syllables. The Five Heroic Syllables (which are) the Five Wisdoms subdue the enemy, the five poisons of the impurities. The armour of the Five Heroic Syllables is put on. The Five Heroic Syllables vanquish the Evil One, and the five poisons are neutralised in the expanse of the Five Wisdoms". (KA: 17a-b).

A major part of the ritual now follows, viz. the presentation of offerings (*gtad-ya*) to the deceased. These are of two kinds: first, actual gifts, intended to satisfy all his material and intellectual desires—the latter in the form of *bon*, the Doctrine, represented, characteristically, by books; secondly, mental or spiritual qualities which must be activated or brought to conscious realization in the deceased. The offerings are depicted on ritual cards (*tsag-li*) which are held by the Abbot and shown to the *byang-bu* one by one (XIIIa); thereafter the cards are placed in front of the *byang-bu* which has been set on the floor in front of the cotton screen hiding the corpse (XIIIb).

The Bonpos make extensive use of *tsag-li* not only in this, but also in other rituals, in particular rituals which involve the initiation into a certain deity or group of deities. The Buddhists, too, make use of *tsag-li*; for example, their use in a Nyingmapa death ritual has been described by Detlef I. Lauf [Lauf 1970].

First a *tsag-li* symbolizing a suitable dwelling for the deceased is presented (XIV a):

> "By the blessing of the compassion of the Master-Sage (*dpon-gsas*),
> O fortunate son of a god now present,
> you have been summoned from the intermediate state;

---

[11] Two Bonpo examples of printed (woodblock) effigies of the deceased are reproduced in Douglas, N., *Tibetan Tantric Charms and Amulets*, New York 1978, plates 97 and 98. On both effigies the eleven syllables may be seen, though in part somewhat unclearly.

you have been established in the unchanging (*g.yung-drung*),[12] secret class.
A manor, a tent, and a field of three times a thousand worlds
is presented to you, O son of a god now present.
(Thereby) the suffering of terrible heat and cold is calmed.
As offering and gift—an immense palace!
Separated from the round of birth and death,
you are guided on the path to Liberation.
May the Mind-itself (*rang-sems*) obtain Buddhahood!" (KHA: 4b).

This *tsag-li* presents a particularly clear case of continuation of ancient practices. In a text studied by R. A. Stein, originating from Tun-huang, hence dating from the royal period, six elements of the pre-Buddhist funerary cult are presented, only in order to receive a Buddhist reinterpretation. The first of these (in the same way as we are here dealing with the first *tsag-li*) is a so-called 'body-tent' (*ring-gur*) [Stein 1970, 160, 178-179]. While it is somewhat uncertain what exactly this 'body-tent' actually was—one also finds the perhaps equivalent expression *ring-khang*, 'body-house'—it may have been some kind of covering or 'tent' in which an image or representation of the deceased was placed, in which case its function was not dissimilar from that of the *tsag-li* in question.

Thereafter a card symbolizing 'the enjoyment of visible form' (*gzugs-kyi longs-spyod*) is shown (XIV b):

> "Again—the Master-Sage, siblings, wife, relatives, and those who greatly love you having gathered, the nine beautiful things, the enjoyment of visible form, are presented. This limitless enjoyment of form is for your own enjoyment as offering upwards (i.e. to the gods) and giving downwards (i.e. to all sentient beings). By the power of thus offering and giving, may the two obscurations be cleansed and the two heaps (of merit and wisdom) be gathered, and may the Mind-itself obtain Buddhahood!" (KHA: 5a).

Each subsequent card is presented with the same formula, in which the prayer for Liberation and Buddhahood follows the specific satisfaction to be derived from the offering. In addition to the two cards already mentioned, cards are presented symbolizing the enjoyment of sound (*sgra*), smell (*dri*), taste (*ro*), touch (*reg-pa*), ornaments (*rgyan*), *bon*, and 'treasures' (*gter*). (XIVc-XVIc). The idea of offering various articles which the deceased made use of in this life and which he is presumed to crave in his present state clearly belongs—historically speaking—to a different religious world from that of the concepts of 'Liberation' and 'Buddhahood'. There can be little doubt that this 'offering' represents a continuation—inserted into a new religious context—of the pre-Buddhist practice, discussed above, of offering a wide range of precious or useful objects in connection with the burial of the kings. In fact, in connection with the present-day ritual the deceased is said to become, through these offerings, like a universal monarch. There is however an obvious reevaluation of these objects when they are presented as 'objects of the six senses'—a concept common to Bonpos as well as Buddhists—viz. sight (to which 'form' is the corresponding object), sound, smell, taste, touch, and thought (to which *bon* corresponds). On the other hand, the 'ornaments' and 'treasure' cannot be interpreted in a similar way, and may be considered as being in a more direct way elements which have

[12] The term *g.yung-drung* implies peace, stability, permanence, eternity. It is the prime characteristic of *bon*, which is hence usually styled *g.yung-drung bon*. The visual symbol of *g.yung-drung* is a svastika, which among the Bonpos turns towards the left (among the Buddhists it turns towards the right, cf. above p. 5). Cf. XXVIc.

been handed over from the ancient mortuary cult. The same practice—that of presenting the deceased with 'wordly' offerings in the course of the death ritual—exists among the Nyingmapas, and has been described by David L. Snellgrove [Snellgrove 1957, 262-274].

The following six *tsag-li* represent the mental qualities etc. referred to above. They depict six animals—yak, horse, sheep, *khyung* (a bird identified with the Indian garuḍa), dragon, lion (XVIIa-XVIIIc)—and are placed beside the cards already standing by the *byang-bu*.

"The divine yak, king of Knowledge (*rig-pa*) is presented.
In the wide field of the 'All-Foundation' (*kun-gzhi*) (Consciousness)
(roams) the divine yak, king of Knowledge-itself (*rang-rig*).
On it various ornaments appear, (and) it is loaded with food.
Having proceeded along the path to Liberation to the end,
it quickly reaches the field of Great Happiness,
and having obtained the Absolute Body (*bon-sku*),
original Buddhahood (is obtained) (*ye sangs-rgyas*).

The stallion of the spontaneously-existing Mind-itself (*rang-'byung sems-ñid*) is presented.
In the field of the 'All-Foundation' of Great Happiness
—in order that the Mind-itself should gradually proceed
along the 'stages' and the 'paths'—
the stallion of practice-arising-from-the-Mind (*sems-'byung spyod-pa*)
(carries) the saddle-rug, the crupper and the stirrups of the Clear Light;
it is adorned with the bridle of mindfulness and the halter of watchfulness.
Tamed by the king of Knowledge, having in the flash of a moment reached paradise (*mtho-ris*),
the highest fruit (i.e. Buddhahood) will be obtained.

The divine, magic sheep of Wisdom (*ye-shes*) is presented.
On the green pasture of the 'All-Foundation'
(roams) the divine sheep of Knowledge.
Its wool is the Clear Light; (from it is made)
the rope (for fastening) the load, and the clothes of patience.
Having put on (those clothes), all ignorance,
actions of the round of birth and death, and obscurations are overcome,
and in the sphere of *bon* (*bon-dbyings*) the fruit in the
form of the Three Bodies is obtained.

The great *khyung*, king of (right) View (*lta-ba*), is presented.
The great *khyung* of Knowledge soars in the sky.
With its wide wings it cuts off all error.
The obscurations spontaneously disappear
and original Buddhahood (is obtained).

The turquoise dragon, king of Meditation (*sgom-pa*), is presented.
The great dragon of spiritual vision (*dgongs-pa*) soars in mid-air.
It empties the pit of the round of birth and death, the three planes of existence.
The round of birth and death spontaneously disappears
and manifest Buddhahood (is obtained).

The great lion, king of Practice (*spyod-pa*), is presented.
The great lion of Practice stands proudly on the snow-mountain.
When all the darknesses of the five poisons have disappeared,
all suffering disappears and perfect Buddhahood (is obtained)."
(KHA: 6b-7b).

As already pointed out by Martin Brauen [Brauen 1978, 60], the three animals forming the first group—yak, horse, sheep—are of particular interest as they played an important role in the ancient religion with which the *bon-po* priests were associated, being sacrificed in the course of the mortuary rituals. In the text studied by R. A. Stein [Stein 1970] referred to above, the fourth, fifth, and sixth of the six elements of the pre-Buddhist funerary ritual are sheep, horse, and yak, in that order. The function of these animals—the sacrifice of which is condemned by the Buddhist author of the text—was, as Stein points out [Stein 1970, 169], probably as follows: the sheep was to make a way to the land of the dead, along cliffs and across rivers; the horse was to serve as the mount of the deceased; the task of the yak was either to lead demons astray, or to enter into combat with them. The pre-Buddhist mythology surrounding these animals—how, for instance, the horse undertook to be the mount of man, in life as well as in death—has been intensively studied by R. A. Stein [Stein 1971].

Of these animals, the horse in particular has retained an important place in Buddhist and Bonpo religion. Not only is the horse of the epic hero Ge-sar endowed with numerous supernatural powers [Stein 1959, 535-542], but in the imagery of the later religious poetry the horse remains a symbol of the mind. Thus Mi-la-ras-pa speaks of the "stallion of the Mind" (*sems-kyi rta-pho*) in a song included in his 'biography' [de Jong 1959, 140-142], exactly as in our text which refers to it as the "stallion of the Mind-itself" (*sems-ñid rta-pho*), and in both cases the imagery of the horse is pursued, at times almost coinciding: in our text the rider is the "Knowledge-king" (*rig-pa'i mi-dbang*), in Mi-la-ras-pa the "Knowledge-youth" (*rig-pa'i khye'u-chung*).

The horse as a religious symbol is also prominent in the form of the *rlung-rta*, 'wind-horse' (the Bonpos, however, regularly use the form *klung* (*-rta*), both forms being phonetic renderings of the Chinese *lung*, 'dragon', cf. Snellgrove 1967, 257, printed on prayer-flags which always surround Tibetan monasteries and villages, as well as on small pieces of paper which are scattered to the wind in the course of rituals serving to ensure prosperity, success in undertakings, etc.

The second group of three animals are of a different kind, being mythological creatures. They, or rather the concepts with which they are associated, form a closely-knit triad. Thus their respective spheres—sky, atmosphere, and snow-mountain (i.e. earth)—constitute a common Tibetan cosmological scheme. The faculties which they symbolize—'view' (*lta-ba*), 'meditation' (*sgom-pa*), and 'practice' (*spyod-pa*)—form a triad which is well-known in Buddhism. One notes that 'knowledge' (*rig-pa*) can be substituted for 'view', and that 'spiritual vision' (*dgongs-pa*) can alternate with 'meditation'. Finally we note that 'view' dispels 'error' (*'khrul-pa*), that 'meditation' dispels the round of birth and death, and that 'practice' dispels the 'five poisons'. It seems that these three animals, though not themselves of Buddhist origin, are not associated with pre-Buddhist beliefs and concepts.

The deceased has now been provided with the satisfaction of all his material desires—he is said to have become "like a king"[13]—and by means of the ritual the mental qualities have been activated which are needed in order to be confronted with the deities.

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[13] As explained later by the Abbot. The same concept of becoming a monarch in the course of the death ritual is also found in corresponding Nyingmapa practices [Snellgrove 1957, 272 n.a].

There are four groups of deities. Each deity is depicted on a separate *tsag-li* which is shown to the *byang-bu* by the Abbot as before, but as they represent deities and not offerings, they are placed not on the floor, but on the altar, one after the other (XIXa, b).

The first three groups are the deities presiding over existence within the round of birth and death. Of these, the first group are the 'Six Subduing gShen' (*'dul-ba'i gshen-drug*) (XXa-XXIc). They obviously correspond to the six forms of Avalokiteshvara manifesting himself in the six realms of existence, for instance as represented on the *bhavacakra*, the 'Wheel of Existence'. The Bonpo counterpart of this representation likewise includes the 'Six Subduing gShen'. (Cf. I).

The 'Six Subduing gShen' are invoked in verses of which only the first is given here in full:

> "On a beautiful seat of innumerable lotuses of wondrous light,
> in a charming palace,
> is the subduer of hell, gSang-ba-ngang-ring.
> The colour of his body is blue-red,
> and he holds a 'fire-water' banner;
> he wears the thirteen ornaments of peaceful appearance;
> he performs the powerful activity of guiding
> so that hell becomes empty;
> he is surrounded by innumerable Spiritual Heroes (*sems-dpa'*)
> who are filled with great loving-kindness (*byams-pa*)—
> to him obeisance, presentation of offerings, and prayers (are due)!" (KA: 22b).

In the following stanzas, only the names and attributes of the gShen vary, so that the group of six may be presented as shown on Fig. 3 (see p. 21; cf. also XXXVII-XLb).

The second group consists of the 'Thirteen Primeval gShen' (*ye-gshen bcu-gsum*). They are depicted together on one card (XXIIa) and are not mentioned individually at this stage in the present ritual. Their task is to save living beings from the realm of *bar-do*, i.e. the intermediate state between death and rebirth. The six states over which the previous group presides, together with *bar-do*, constitute the 'Realm of Desire' (*'dod-khams*).[14]

The 'Thirteen Primeval gShen' likewise preside over the thirteen stages of the career of a Spiritual Hero (mentioned later on in the ritual, see below p. 24), and in this connection their names, always including an attribute, are given as follows (cf. XLI-XLVIIb):

(*Associated with the sky*):
1. Nam-mkha'i-ba-dan-can — "Sky-banner"

(*Associated with birds*):
2. Khyung-gi-ru-mtshon-can — "*Khyung*-ensign"
3. rGod-kyi-'phar-'dab-can — "Eagle-wing"
4. rMa-bya'i-ldem-rgyang-can — "Peacock-tailfeather"

(*Associated with weapons*):
5. Zo-bo-spar-shad-can — "Rake (in the form of a) clutching hand"[15]
6. dBal-so-mdung-rtse-can — "Tooth of a *dbal*(-deity as) spear-tip"
7. gSas-mda'-dung-yug-can

[14] The Bonpos share with the Buddhists the cosmological concept of 'Three Realms' (viz. of Desire, Form, and Formlessness).

[15] *sPar-shad* is a "claw—for lifting the linga" [Snellgrove 1967, 277].

Figure 3

	realm		colour	attributes	virtue
gSang-ba ngang-ring	hell	A	blue-red	fire-water banner	benevolence (*byams-pa*)
		B	blue-red	banner and hook	
		C	red	wheel and hook or:vase and hook	
Mu-cho-ldem-drug	tormented spirits	A	white	nectar-bag	generosity (*sbyin-pa*)
		B	green-red	bag and hook	
		C	white	wheel and hook or:vase and hook	
Ti-sangs-rang-zhi	animals	A	green	book	wisdom (*ye-shes*)
		B	blue	book and hook	
		C	green	wheel and vase	
gSang-ba-'dus-pa	humans	A	yellow	drum and flat-bell	tolerance (*yangs-pa*)
		B	yellow	drum and flat-bell	
		C	blue	drum and flat-bell, *and* vase	
lCe-rgyal-bar-ti	demi-gods	A	blue	sword	peacefulness (*zhi-ba*)
		B	blue	sword and hook	
		C	blue	lotus and hook	
Ye-gshen-gtsug-phud	gods	A	white	lute and book	five wisdoms
		B	white	lute and book	
		C	white	sceptre and hook	

A: KA: 22b-24b (reproduced XXa-XXIc).
B: set of thankas in main temple (XXXVII-XLb).
C: *rDzogs-pa chen-po Zhang-zhung sñan-rgyud-las rigs-drug rang-sbyong-gi gdams-pa* 2b-5b, in: *History and Doctrine of Bon-po Niṣpanna-yoga*, ed. Lokesh Chandra and Tenzin Namdak, Śata-piṭaka Series vol. 73, New Delhi 1968.

(*Associated with musical instruments*):

8. rNga-stong-ri-chem-pa-can	"Thundering drum"
9. gShang-khri-lo-gnam-grags-can	"Sky-resounding flat-bell"
10. Dung-'phar-po-'phar-chung-can	"Conch"

(*Associated with dress*):

11. Che-rgyal-rgod-zhu-can	"Eagle-hat"
12. Yang-rgyal-'brug-slag-can	"Dragon-hide"
13. gCod-pa-khra-slag-can	"Falcon-hide"

Groups of deities of this kind as well as their collective designations tend to be rather fluid entities. Thus the above group may be compared with the 'Thirteen Primeval gShen (who are) gÑan-po' (*ye-gshen gñan-po bcu-gsum*) who according to the *gZer-mig* form part of gShen-rab's entourage at the moment of his birth; their names, however, are not identical with the above names. On the other hand, all the *ye-gshen* listed above—together with three more—are enumerated (and in the same order) in the *gZi-brjid*[16] as the 'Gods of the Atmosphere, Gods of Clear Light' (*bar-lha 'od-gsal-gyi lha*) (KA(1)12b).

The third group consists of an extremely important series of deities, the 'Four Main Blessed Ones' (*bder-gshegs gtso-bzhi*) (XXXIIb). They are the following:

1. Byams-ma, "Loving Mother"
2. gShen-lha-'od-dkar, "gShen-god, White-light"
3. Sangs-po-'bum-khri, "Pure One, Hundred-thousand, Ten-thousand"
4. sTon-pa-gshen-rab.

In other contexts the last three are known as *lha-srid-gshen-gsum*, "The god, the 'world-god', the gshen, (in all) three".

Byams-ma corresponds to the Buddhist Prajñāpāramitā, whose colour frequently likewise is yellow [de Mallmann 1975, 306]. Like her Buddhist counterpart, Byams-ma holds a lotus stalk in either hand; however, instead of a hook, one of the flowers contains the syllables A, OṂ, RAṂ, HŪṂ, DZA,[17] while the other supports a mirror.

Byams-ma is invoked in the following stanza:

"In a charming and beautiful divine palace,
to the east, on a white lotus,
is the Great Mother Sa-trig-er-sangs, of yellow colour.
As attributes, she holds the 'Five Heroic Syllables' and a mirror.
She has the perfect 'body of enjoyment'
adorned with the beautiful ornaments of peaceful appearance.
She is seated on a throne supported by two greatly agile lions".
(KA: 21b).

The other three deities are invoked in identical terms, only key-words being changed,[18] as shown in Fig. 4.

Figure 4

	direction	colour	attributes	support for throne
Sa-trig-er-sangs	east	yellow	Five Heroic Syllables and mirror	lion
gShen-lha-'od-dkar	north	white	hook	elephant
Sangs-po-'bum-khri	west	white	banner	*khyung*
sTon-pa-gshen-rab	south	blue	sceptre	wheel

[16] For further references to the *gZi-brjid*, see Kvaerne 1974,98 and Snellgrove 1967.

[17] This set of syllables differs from that found in the *gZer-mig*, see above p. 9.

[18] A passage from the *gZer-mig* containing an almost identical description of the 'Four Main Blessed Ones' has been translated by Helmut Hoffmann [Hoffmann, 1961, 102-103].

Leaving aside sTon-pa-gshen-rab, the remaining two deities do not seem to have obvious Buddhist counterparts. gShen-lha-'od-dkar might be seen as having some traits in common with Amitābha, especially the association with 'light'. Sangs-po-'bum-khri, being the lord of the visible world (hence, like the world itself, known as *srid-pa*, cf. [Stein 1973], might be compared with the Indian demiurgic god Brahmā, but in both cases it is quite clear that there is no close connection between the Bonpo and Buddhist (or Indian) deities in question. The 'Four Chief Blessed Ones' deliver beings from the Realm of Form as well as from the Realm of Formlessness. Thus the ritual has achieved the invocation of deities presiding over all Three Realms of Existence.

Finally, a ritual card showing Kun-tu-bzang-po, "The All-Good", is introduced. (XXIIc). This deity is the "essence of all Buddhas" (*rgyal-kun ngo-bo*), and hence is shown without attributes; he is naked and the colour of his body is white. Kun-tu-bzang-po (Sanskrit: Samantabhadra) is also well-known among Buddhists in Tibet, especially among the Kagyütpas and the Nyingmapas; his colour, however, is generally blue [de Mallmann 1975, 334]. Samantabhadra has a long history and varied iconography, originally as a bodhisattva, later on as a buddha [de Mallmann 1975, 331-335].

This part of the ritual is terminated by an offering in the form of food (flour, biscuits, tea) to all the deities (XXIIIa); the offerings are placed on a pile of sticks in an iron basin. The sticks are lighted and the flaming basin carried outside and thrown away. (XXIIIb).

The deceased has now passed beyond what might be called 'mundane existence' in the Three Realms. He is now ready to enter upon the supernormal planes of existence which precede final Liberation. Such existence, precisely because it is 'beyond the world', necessitates a series of consecrations or initiations (*dbang*, lit. "power", i.e. "empowerment", *dbang-bskur*, corresponding to Sanskrit *abhiṣeka*). While some may have received these consecrations in this life, they may, after death, be conferred on all.

The procedure is as follows: A monk, holding the *byang-bu*, crouches in front of the Abbot's seat. The Abbot touches the *byang-bu* with the appropriate *tsag-li* as the successive consecrations are conferred. (XXIVa).

1. The Vase. (XXVa).

> "Externally—the Consecration of the Vase, the Palace: *A*! the jewel Vase is the palace of the gods. By means of the consecration of this vase, which is inseparable from its contents, the divine host of Blessed Ones, may the perfected consecration of the *maṇḍala*-palace be obtained!" (KA: 26a).

2. The Root-Deities.—This consecration repeats the confrontation with the deities which have already been introduced. Each group of deities has a separate card, practically identical to those already described. Only the verse describing the wrathful deities, styled 'the Four Wrathful Doorkeepers' (XXVb), is translated here:

> "Internally—the Consecration of the Root-Deities: *A*! By means of the consecration of the four wrathful door-keepers who 'liberate' (i.e. annihilate) all hindrances and inimical obstructions, may the consecration of the calming of all hindrances be obtained, the doors of birth, old age, sickness, and death having been cut off!"(KA: 26a)

Thereafter are invoked the Six Subduing gShen, the Thirteen Primeval gShen, Spiritual Heroes (*ye-gshen sems-dpa' bcu-gsum*), the 'Four Main Blessed Ones', and 'the All-Good'. Although this is not explicitly done in the ritual, for the sake of clarity it may perhaps be permitted to arrange the deities in the form of the following *maṇḍala*:

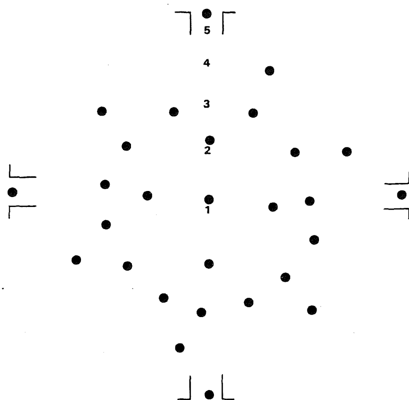


Figure 5

1. Kun-tu-bzang-po
2. The Four Chief Blessed Ones
3. The Thirteen Primeval gShen
4. The Six Subduing gShen
5. The Four Door-Keepers

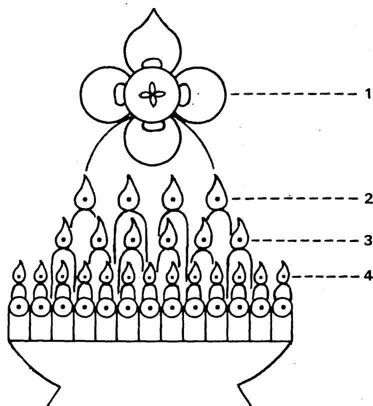


Figure 6

1. Kun-tu-bzang-po
2. The Four Chief Blessed Ones
3. The Six Subduing gShen
4. The Thirteen Primeval gShen

3. This ideal *maṇḍala* is in fact repeated in the following 'secret' consecration, that of the 'Offering-Cake' (*gtor-ma*). (XXVIa).
The *tsag-li* of this consecration was accompanied by an actual *gtor-ma*, with which the *byang-bu* was likewise touched. At this moment, one of the monks and a layman, who now entered the room and was given the *byang-bu* to hold, were blessed by the Abbot and their heads touched by the *gtor-ma* and the *tsag-li*. (XXIVa).

4. The final, 'ultra-secret' (*yang-gsang*), consecration is that of the 'Nectar-Pills' (*bdud-rtsi'i ril-bu*). (XXVIb).

Buddhist tantric texts likewise enumerate four major consecrations. However, only the first of these, that of the Vase (Sanskrit *kalaśa*), corresponds to the Bonpo scheme [Kvaerne 1975, 94-102].

The deceased is now, ideally, no longer a mundane being, caught up in the round of birth and death, but a *g.yung-drung sems-dpa'*, lit. "unchanging spiritual hero", correspon-ding to the Buddhist concept of a *bodhisattva.* He must now proceed through the successive stages of the career of such a being. There are thirteen such stages, each stage being characterised, among other things, by a particular virtue which is there brought to ultimate perfection, or by a particular supernatural power. Likewise, each stage is presid-ed over by a gShen, the whole group of thirteen being identical with the Thirteen Primeval gShen which we have discussed above (p. 20).

The stages, with their corresponding virtues or powers, are as follows (GA: 1a-5a):[19]

1. Joyful (*rab-dga'*) — generosity (*sbyin-pa*)
2. Immaculate crystal (*dri-med shel*) — morality (*tshul-khrims*)
3. Effulgent (*'od-zer phro-ba*) — patience (*bzod-thob*)
4. Mudrā-forming (*phyag-rgya bsgyur-ba*) — courage (*spob-pa*)
5. Clouds of *bon*-itself (*bon-ñid sprin-tshogs*) — perfection of self-nature (*rang-bzhin rdzogs-pa*)
6. Blissful insight (*bde-ldan rtogs-pa*) — unimpeded magic power (*thogs-med rdzu-'phrul*)
7. Fulfilment of all wishes (*yi-bzhin grub-pa*) — joyful benevolence (*dga'-ldan byams-pa*)
8. Unbroken purity (*ma-chags dag-pa*) — prayer (*smon-lam*)
9. Wheel of letters (*yi-ge 'khor-lo*) — compassion and skilful means (*thugs-rje thabs-ldan*)
10. Unchanging eternity (*mi-'gyur g.yung-drung*) — unchanging eternity (sic)
11. All-light (*kun-tu 'od*) — sphere of (heavenly) 'Og-min (*'og-min dbyings*)
12. The *bon*-sphere of great joy (*bde-chen bon-dbyings*) — great joy (*bde-ba chen-po*)
13. Great firmness (*mi-g.yo chen-po*) — ultimate great perfection (*mthar-phyin rdzogs-chen*)

The idea behind this scheme is obviously the same as that of the *daśa-bhūmi*, the 'ten stages' of a *bodhisattva's* career in Buddhism. However, only in the case of the first three stages is there symmetry with the Buddhist scheme: *pramuditā*, *vimalā*, and *prabhākarī*, with the corresponding virtues of *dāna*, *śīla*, and *kṣānti*. Further, no. 5 may be compared with *dharmameghā*, which is no. 10 in the Buddhist scheme, and no. 13 with *acalā*, which is no. 8 in the Buddhist scheme [Dayal 1932, 270-291]. Careful comparison with Nyingmapa sources would probably reveal further correspondences; thus no. 9 is found in Nyingmapa sources, but only as the 13th and highest stage.[20]

In the ritual, each stage is symbolised by a *tsag-li* showing a *g.yung-drung*. (XXVIc). A row of such cards are placed on the floor, starting near the corpse and diagonally towards the altar. The *byang-bu* is placed on the first card, and then moved forward one card as the characteristics of each stage are recited. (XXVIIa,b). The effect is an unusually expressive ritualization of a spiritual process.

At the end of the row of *tsag-li* is placed a card showing Kun-tu-bzang-po. The final liberation of the deceased will take place when he is united with Kun-tu-bzang-po, who is, in reality, nothing but the personification of the inexpressible Absolute. However, before this final union takes place, the fact that rebirth in the six states of existence within the round of birth and death is no longer possible must be demonstrated ritually, and this is achieved as follows: the Abbot holds the *byang-bu* in his left hand, and by means of a lighted incense-stick he burns away, one by one, the six syllables which had been written on it at the beginning of the ritual. (XXVIIa). As each state of rebirth is eliminated, the Abbot snaps his fingers. (XXVIIIb).

The ritual now reaches its dramatic climax: 'transference' (*'pho-ba*) of the consciousness of the deceased to a state of final Liberation. The Abbot pulls his cloak over his head and

[19] Although the *title* of the text refers to *ten* 'stages' and ten ritual cards are placed on the floor, the actual number of stages is *thirteen*, and each is described in the text. Cf. however Snellgrove 1967, 127 "If one practises the ten perfections, one treads in due order the ten swastika stages". The tenth sage according to ibid., 126, line 30 is called *g.yung-drung theg-pa'i sa*, cf. *mi-'gyur g.yung-drung* which is the tenth stage in the present text. The virtues enumerated in Snellgrove 1967, 127 differ slightly from those listed here.

[20] I am indebted to Samten G. Karmay for this information.

enters a state of meditation, in the course of which he unites the consciousness of the dead man with his own, and then his own (now identified with that of the deceased) with Kun-tu-bzang-po. (XXIXa). The deceased has thereby obtained Liberation, the purpose of the ritual is fulfilled, and after a few minutes the Abbot emerges from meditation.

There remains only the logical termination of the ritual. The *byang-bu*, which no longer contains the consciousness of the deceased (indeed, his consciousness has ceased, as an individual entity, to exist), is dismantled and the piece of paper with the picture of the deceased is burnt. (XXIXb). The ashes are preserved, and mixed with earth, will be used for making a few *tsha-tsha* (small religious effigies made by pressing earth into a mould). The ritual is completed, and the Abbot is served lunch and given a small sum of money wrapped in a white cotton scarf. (XXXa).

Early the following morning, before sunrise, a senior monk assisted by three other monks and two or three laymen perform the ritual of cremation in a field behind the house. (XXXb-XXXIIb). Later on the same morning, the *klong-rgyas* ritual, referred to above, is performed in the house of the deceased. The elaborate offerings to the Thousand Blessed Ones, the presentation of which form the substance of the ritual, have been prepared the day before (XXXIIIa,b), and have now been arranged on the altar (XXXIVa-XXXVb). The ritual lasts the entire day.

After the cremation, some of the ashes are mixed with earth and moulded into miniature stupas (*tsha-tsha*) which are deposited in the *tsha-tsha khang*, a small windowless building situated behind the monastery. (XXXVI).

CATALOGUE OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Plate I
The 'Wheel of Existence' (*srid-pa'i 'khor-lo*) of the Bonpos, with the Six Subduing gShen. A detailed analysis may be found in Kvaerne 1981B. Thanka by Lhazo Namkha. Photo: Thubten Tenzin.

Plate II
a) A *bon-po*, a sooth-sayer (*mo-ma*), and a beggar (the 'black *gha-ha-dha*') sacrifice a human victim as a 'ransom' (*glud*) for a sick prince. (*gZer-mig*, Chap. 9.). Detail from thanka, Musée Guimet MA-126. Photo: Per Kvaerne, by kind permission of Musée Guimet.
b) sTon-pa-gshen-rab, of golden colour, is seated to the right of an altar on which may be seen, on the top row, the white paper with the figure of the deceased (the *ming-byang* or *byang-bu*). Detail from thanka, private collection.

Plate III
a) The main temple of the Bonpo monastery in Himachal Pradesh, India. Photo: Per Kvaerne.
b) The interior of the main temple. Behind the central altar is an image of sTon-pa-gshen-rab. Photo: Priscilla Ellis.

Plate IV
a) Sangye Tenzin Jongdong, the Abbot of the Bonpo monastery, in the dress of a fully ordained monk (*drang-srong*). He wears the "lotus-hat" (*pad-zhva*), and his staff (*mkhar-gsil*) is placed against the wall. Cf. Snellgrove 1967, 269-273. Photo: Geir Eriksen.
b) Tenzin Namdak, Head Teacher (*slob-dpon*) of the Bonpo monastery. Photo: Per Kvaerne.

Plate V
The corpse. Photo: Jon Jerstad.

The Performance of the Ritual

Plate VI
a) The Abbot plays a drum (*rnga*, suspended from the ceiling) and a flat-bell (*gshang*), the assisting monk plays a pair of cymbals (*gsil-sñan*). Photo: Jon Jerstad.
b) An assisting monk blowing a conch (*gdung*). Photo: Jon Jerstad.

Plate VII
A monk prepares the 'ransom' (*glud*) and offering-cakes (*gtor-ma*). Photo: Martin Brauen.

Plate VIII
a) The *gtor-ma* are painted with red colour. Photo: Martin Brauen.
b) The 'ransom' (*glud*) in the shape of a human figure made of dough is prepared. The little lamp in front of the *glud* is lighted when it is offered to the demons. Photo: Martin Brauen.

Plate IX
a) The Abbot holds the *bla-glud*. The small lamp in front of it has been lighted. Photo: Jon Jerstad.
b) The *bla-glud*, having been offered to the demons, is thrown out. Photo: Per Kvaerne.

Plate X
The consciousness of the deceased is summoned by the Abbot to the *byang-bu* which has been placed on the table in front of him. Photo: Jon Jerstad.

Plate XI
a) The letter A, the final letter of the Tibetan alphabet, associated in the ritual with sTon-pa-gshen-rab. (The *tsag-li* is from a set connected with a different ritual). Photo: Per Kvaerne.
b) The stereotyped picture of the deceased in the centre of the *byang-bu*. Photo: Martin Brauen.

Plate XII
a) The Abbot makes the gesture of summoning the consciousness of the deceased. Photo: Jon Jerstad.
b) The Abbot asperses the *byang-bu*, thereby purifying the deceased and making him fit to receive the offerings and consecrations which follow. Photo: Jon Jerstad.

Plate XIII
a) The first *tsag-li* is shown to the deceased by the Abbot. The *byang-bu* has now been removed to the other end of the room, and placed on the floor next to the screen hiding the corpse. Photo: Jon Jerstad.
b) The *tsag-li* representing the offerings are placed on the floor in front of the *byang-bu*. The *byang-bu* is set against the screen behind which is the corpse. Photo: Jon Jerstad.

The Ritual Cards

The set of *tsag-li* reproduced here (XIV-XVIII, XX-XXII, XXV-XXVI) has been painted by the Bonpo artist Lhazo Namkha. It comprises 41 cards, some of which, however, duplicate each other (in which case only one has been reproduced here), while others (viz. the cards symbolizing the stages of the career of a 'Spiritual Hero') are only to be distinguished by different colours, in which case only one card, by way of sample, has been reproduced. These particular *tsag-li* are the ones which were actually used in the ritual. The number in parentheses accompanying each card refers to its position in the set. Nos. 16-21 have been photographed by Martin Brauen, the remainder by Per Kvaerne.

Plate XIV
a) The first offering: a dwelling for the deceased. (1)
b) The second offering: the enjoyment of form: a lamp (*mar-me*), a mirror (*me-long*) with streamers (*dar-'phyangs*), and an arrow with silk ribbons (*mda'-dar*). (2)
c) The third offering: the enjoyment of sound: cymbals (*sil-sñan*), shawms (*rgya-ling*), drum (*rnga*), conch (*dung*), flat-bell (*gshang*), flute, and lute (*pi-wang*). (3)

Plate XV
a) The fourth offering: the enjoyment of smell: flowers (*me-tog*) and incense (*spos*). (4)
b) The fifth offering: the enjoyment of taste: flour (*bye-ma*), tea (*ja*), cakes (*khab-tse*), and fruit (*shing-thog*). (5)
c) The sixth offering: the enjoyment of touch, illustrated by articles of religious dress, arranged in three tiers. Above: *'dul-gos*, i.e. the robes of a fully ordained monk, cf. Snellgrove 1967, 270; middle: *cham-gos*, the robes of sacred dance (cloak (*ber*), skirt (*pang-khebs*), and dagger (*phur-pa*)); below: *sngags-gos*, the robes of a tantric adept (including the *zhva-nag* and the *zhva-dkar*, 'black' and 'white hat', antilope horn (*gtsod-ru*), and 'tiger cloak' (*stag-ber*)), cf. Snellgrove 1967, 277, 281. Note the implicit hierarchy. (6)

Plate XVI
a) The seventh offering: the enjoyment of adornments (*rgyan-cha*), likewise arranged in three tiers. Above: the belongings of a monk, viz. book-covers (*sho-ka-li*), water-bag (*chab-blug*), begging-bowl (*lhung-bzed*), and rosary (*'phreng-ba*), cf. Snellgrove 1967, 273, 275; middle: the weapons of a man, viz. arrows (*mda'*), sword (*gri*), and bow (*gzhu*); below: the ornaments of a woman, viz. ear-ornaments (*rna-rgyan*) and amulet-box (*ga'u*) decorated with *gzi* (striped precious stone), turquoise (*g.yu*), and coral (*byi-ru*). Note the hierarchy of values implicit in the arrangement. (7)
b) The eighth offering: the enjoyment of *bon*, symbolized by books (*dpe-cha*). (8)
c) The ninth offering: the enjoyment of treasures (*gter*), viz. elephant tusks, horn of rhinoceros, the three jewels (symbolizing the Buddha, the Doctrine, and the 'Spiritual Heroes'), and royal ornament (the wheel of a universal monarch). (9)

Plate XVII
a) The divine yak, king of Knowledge (*rig-pa*). (10)
b) The stallion of the Mind (*sems*). (11)
c) The divine sheep of Wisdom (*ye-shes*). (12)

Plate XVIII
a) The *khyung*, king of View (*lta-ba*). (13)
b) The dragon, king of Meditation (*sgom-pa*). (14)
c) The lion, king of Practice (*spyod-pa*). (15)

Plate XIX
a) A *tsag-li* showing one of the Six Subduing gShen is held by the Abbot before being placed on the altar. Photo: Jon Jerstad.
b) After their invocation, the *tsag-li* showing the four Chief Blessed Ones is placed on the altar. Photo: Jon Jerstad.

Plate XX

a) gSang-ba-ngang-ring, the gShen who subdues hell, holding a 'fire-water banner' (*me-chu'i rgyal-mtshan*). The colour of his body is blue. (16)

b) Mu-cho-ldem-drug, the gShen who subdues the tormented spirits (*yi-dvags*), holding a bag containing nectar (*bdud-rtsi'i rkyal-bu*). The colour of his body is white. (17)

c) Ti-sangs-rang-zhi, the gShen who subdues animals, holding a jewel book (*rin-chen glegs-bam*). The colour of his body is green. (18)

Plate XXI

a) gSang-ba-'dus-pa, the gShen who subdues men. He holds a golden drum (*rnga*) and a flat-bell (*gshang*). The colour of his body is yellow. (19)

b) lCe-rgyal-bar-ti, the gShen who subdues the demi-gods, holding a *dbal*-sword (*dbal-gyi shang-lang*). The colour of his body is blue. (20)

c) Ye-gshen-gtsug-phud, the gShen who subdues the gods, holding a lute (*pi-wang*) and a book (*po-ti*). The colour of his body is white. (21)

Plate XXII

a) The Thirteen Primeval gShen (*ye-gshen bcu-gsum*) who preside over the realm of *bar-do*, the intermediate state between death and rebirth. See XXXVI-XLII. (22)

b) The Four Chief Blessed Ones (*bder-gshegs gtso-bzhi*). Top left: Byams-ma, right: gShen-lha-'od-dkar; bottom left: Sangs-po-'bum-khri, right: sTon-pa-gshen-rab. For colours and attributes, see Fig. 4. (23)

c) Kun-tu-bzang-po. The colour of his body is white, he is naked and has the long hair of an ascetic. The halo round his head is green, that round his body, red fading into white. He is seated on a pink lotus. (24)

Plate XXIII

a) The offerings of food to the deities presiding over the Three Realms are brought to the fire. Photo: Jon Jerstad.

b) The still burning offerings are carried outside and thrown away. Photo: Per Kvaerne.

Plate XXIV

a) Imparting the consecration of the 'Offering-Cake'. A layman, holding the *byang-bu*, crouches in front of the Abbot. The Abbot, holding a *gtor-ma*, blesses the assisting monk and the layman. The corresponding *tsag-li* may be seen in front of hem. Photo: Jon Jerstad.

b) The Abbot imparts the consecration of the 'Nectar-Pills'. Photo: Jon Jerstad.

Plate XXV

a) The *tsag-li* used for the Consecration of the Vase. (25)

b) The Four Door-keepers, the first group of deities invoked during the Consecration of the 'Root-Deities'. (26)

(The following three *tsag-li* used during this consecration show the Six Subduing gShen—on one card—, the Thirteen Primeval gShen, and Kun-tu-bzang-po. (27,28,29)).

Plate XXVI
a) The Consecration of the Offering-Cake (*gtor-ma*). (30)
b) The Consecration of the Jewel-Pills. The pills are in a blue alms-bowl (*lhung-bzed*), partly covered by three cloths, viz. (starting with the innermost) red, green, and yellow. (31)
c) A *g.yung-drung*, symbolizing one of the Thirteen Stages of a Spiritual Hero. In fact only ten cards are used in the ritual. Apart from the present *g.yung-drung*, of which the legs are white (bottom), green (right), red (top), and blue, and the centre yellow, the cards all show a white *g.yung-drung* against a black background. (32-41)

Plate XXVII
a) The *byang-bu*, now consecrated by the Four Consecrations, is brought forward along the stages of a 'Spiritual Hero' (*sems-dpa'*), each stage symbolized by a *tsag-li* showing a *g.yung-drung* (symbol in the shape of a swastika, signifying unchangingness). Photo: Jon Jerstad.
b) Close-up of the preceding. Photo: Jon Jerstad.

Plate XXVIII
a) By means of an incense-stick, the Abbot burns away the six syllables on the *byang-bu* which symbolise the six states of rebirth. Photo: Jon Jerstad.
b) For each syllable that is burnt away, the Abbot snaps his fingers in a gesture of finality. Photo: Jon Jerstad.

Plate XXIX
a) The Abbot, having drawn his cloak over his head, enters a state of meditation in order to effect the 'transference' (*'pho-ba*), i.e. the Liberation, of the consciousness of the deceased. Photo: Jon Jerstad.
b) After the *'pho-ba*, the Abbot burns the piece of paper on which was drawn the picture of the deceased. Photo: Jon Jerstad.

Plate XXX
a) The Abbot is offered lunch after the ritual is completed. Photo: Jon Jerstad.

The Cremation

b) Four monks officiate at the cremation. The layman to the left holds a drum slung on a stick. The monks wear headbands instead of *rigs-lnga* (crowns consisting of five pieces corresponding to the five Buddhas). Photo: Axel Ström.

Plate XXXI
a) A paper crown (black, with red border) is placed on the pyre. On it are visible the syllables *SRUṂ* (left) and *RAṂ* (the latter is the seed-syllable of the element fire). Photo: Jon Jerstad.
b) Behind the crown are placed three inscribed tablets, being, from the left, of white, blue and red colour. The inscriptions are in Zhang-zhung: (white) *ñe-lo dun-la dan-mar tshangs*, (blue) *a-ti a-ye ho mer tshangs*, (red) *kang-tseg ram-la li-mar tshangs*. The mantras invoke the Three Bodies of the god of Fire (*sku-gsum me-lha*). Photo: Axel Ström.

Plate XXXII
a) Small candles are lit on top of the tablets. Photo: Axel Ström.
b) A monk lights the pyre. Photo: Axel Ström.

The Klong-rgyas Ritual

Plate XXXIII
a) Offerings for the *klong-rgyas* ritual are made ready by monks and laymen outside the house of the deceased. Photo: Per Kvaerne.
b) Paper offerings for the *klong-rgyas* ritual are pasted together. Photo: Per Kvaerne.

Plate XXXIV
a) Monks getting ready to perform the *klong-rgyas* ritual. The offerings are on the altar and on a low table to the right. Photo: Axel Ström.
b) Offerings for the *klong-rgyas* ritual arranged on the altar. Photo: Axel Ström.

Plate XXXV
a) The same. Photo: Axel Ström.
b) Offerings—represented symbolically on paper—for the *klong-rgyas* ritual. Photo: Jon Jerstad.

Plate XXXVI
Interior of the *tsha-tsha khang*, a small windowless building on the outskirts of the monastic area in which are kept miniature stupas made from ashes from the funeral pyre or from the effigy of the deceased, together with damaged pages from sacred scriptures. Photo: Markus Aksland.

The Six Subduing gShen

A set of six large thankas, painted by Lhazo Namkha, on display in the main temple, showing the Six Subduing gShen. They hold the same attributes as seen in the set of *tsag-li*, but in addition, nos. 1,2,3, and 5 also hold a hook (*lcags-kyu*), symbol of active compassion. The colour of the body of each is golden, but they may be distinguished by the colour of their haloes. Photo: Jon Jerstad.

Plate XXXVII
gSang-ba-ngang-ring. The body halo is blue with rays of red.

Plate XXXVIII
Mu-cho-ldem-drug. The body halo is green with rays of red.

Plate XXXIX
a) Ti-sangs-rang-zhi. The body halo is blue with rays of green, the upper halo is green.
b) gSang-ba-'dus-pa. The body halo is yellow, the upper halo green.

Plate XL
a) lCe-rgyal-bar-ti. The body halo is blue, the upper halo green.
b) Ye-gshen-gtsug-phud. The body halo is white, the upper halo green.

The Thirteen Primeval gShen

A set of thirteen well-used *tsag-li*, brought from Tibet, each showing one of the Thirteen Primeval gShen. The cards are taken from a set used for a different ritual. Each figure is placed within a red halo set against a blue background. The frame of each card is green. Unless otherwise stated, the dress of the gShen is green. Photo: Per Kvaerne.

Plate XLI
The first Primeval gShen, Nam-mkha'i-ba-dan-can. He holds a 'sky-banner' in his left hand. The colour of his body is white.

Plate XLII
a) The second Primeval gShen, Khyung-gi-ru-mtshon-can. He holds a pole to which the effigy of a blue, horned *khyung* (a mythical bird indentified by the Tibetans with the Indian garuḍa) is affixed. The colour of his body is blue.
b) The third Primeval gShen, rGod-kyi-'phar-'dab-can. He holds a white eagle's feather in his right hand. The colour of his body is yellow.

Plate XLIII
a) The fourth Primeval gShen, rMa-bya'i-ldem-rgyang-can, holding a peacock's tailfeather in his right hand. The colour of his body is red, that of his dress, blue.
b) The fifth Primeval gShen, Zo-bo-spar-shad-can, his left hand holding a metal claw (*spar-shad*). The colour of his body is blue, that of his dress, white.

Plate XLIV
a) The sixth Primeval gShen, dBal-so-mdung-rtse-can, holding a spear in his right hand. The colour of his body is white, the upper part of his dress blue, the lower part green.
b) The seventh Primeval gShen, gSas-mda'-dung-yug-can, holding an arrow in his right hand.

Plate XLV
a) The eighth Primeval gShen, rNga-stong-ri-chem-pa-can, holding a drum surmounted by the head of a yellow *khyung* in his right hand, and beating it with a curved drum-stick. The colour of his body is yellow.
b) The ninth Primeval gShen, gShang-khri-lo-gnam-grags-can, playing a yellow flat-bell. The colour of his body is blue.

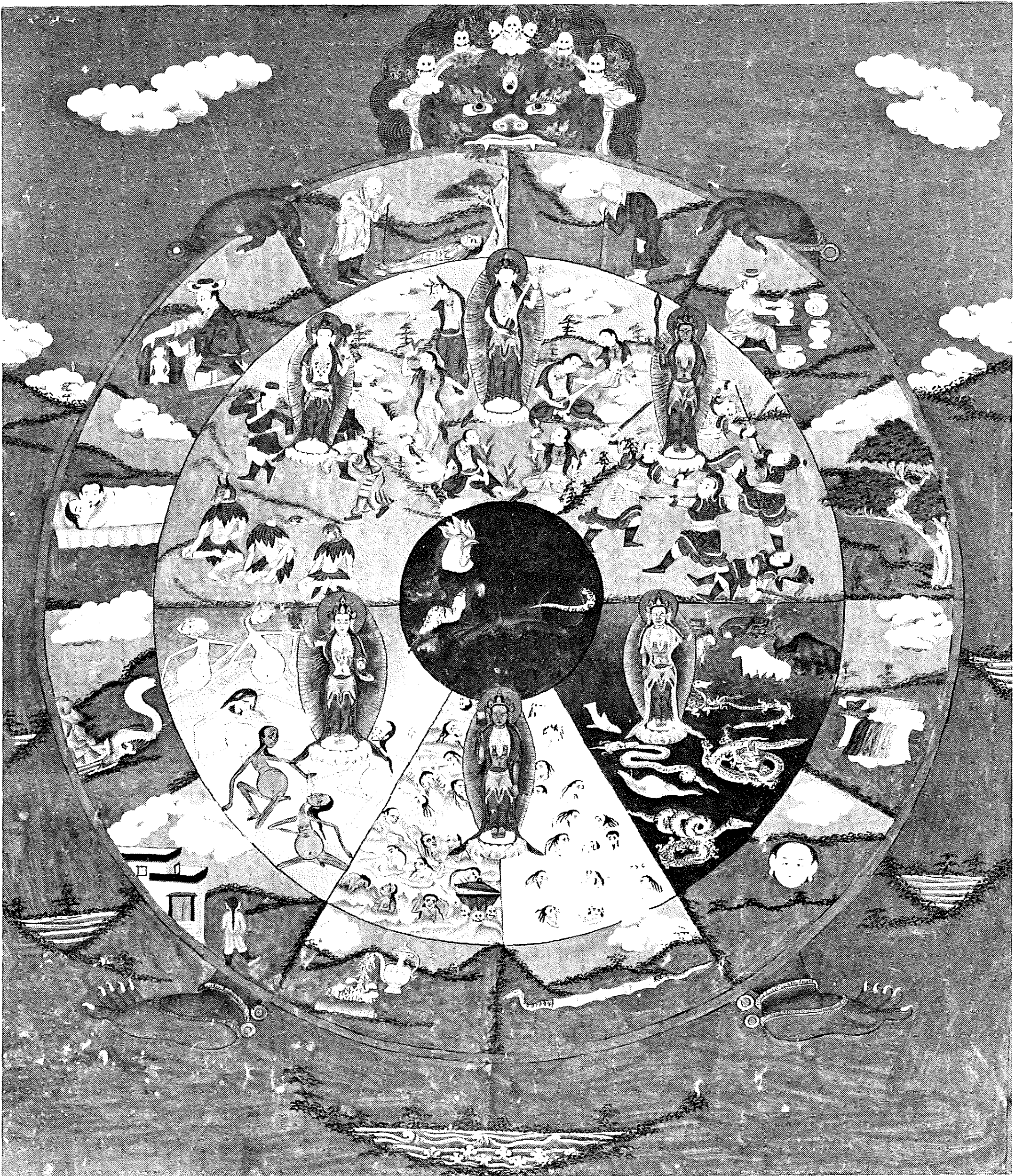
Plate XLVI
a) The tenth Primeval gShen, Dung-'phar-po-'phar-chung-can, blowing a conch. The colour of his body is white.

b) The eleventh Primeval gShen, Che-rgyal-rgod-zhu-can, holding a yellow vase from which grows a yellow flower in his right hand. He wears a hat in the form of a white eagle, and the colour of his body is yellow.

Plate XLVII
a) The twelfth Primeval gShen, Yang-rgyal-'brug-slag-can, holding a yellow vase from which grows a three-leafed plant. The colour of his body is white. Hi wears the green-scaled skin of a dragon, and the colour of his dress is blue.
b) The thirteenth Primeval gShen, gCod-pa-khra-slag-can, holding a yellow vase from which grows a three-leafed plant. He wears the yellow-feathered skin of a hawk, and the colour of his body is blue.

Plate XLVIII
The cremation fire. Wood-block. Photo: Per Kvaerne.

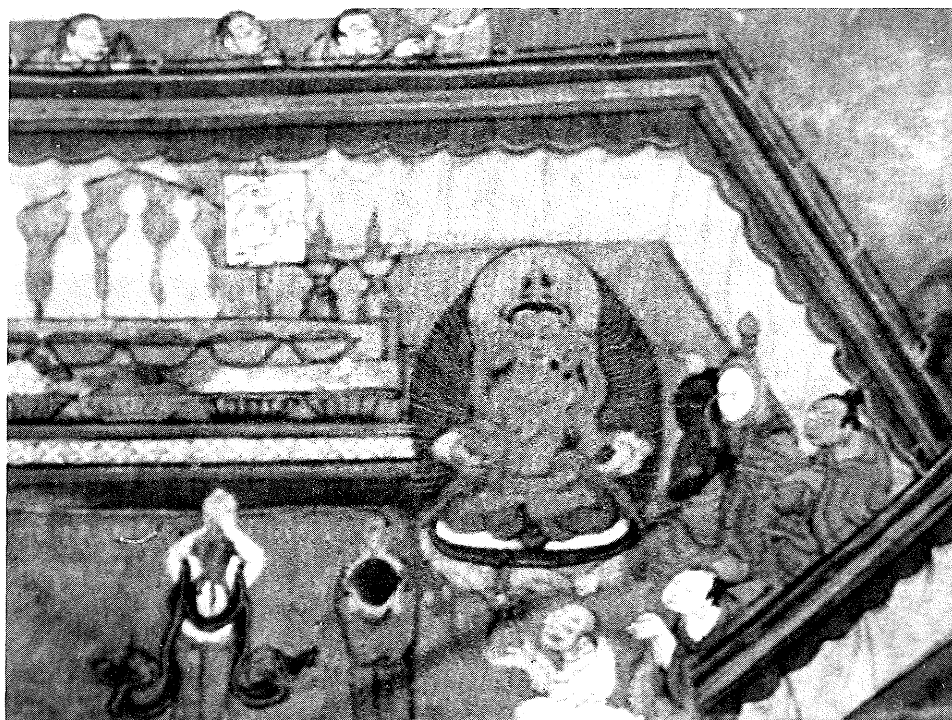
PLATES I-XLVIII



The Wheel of Existence



a) Sacrifice of a human victim as a 'ransom' for a sick prince.



b) sTon-pa-gshen-rab performs the death ritual.



a) The main temple.



b) Interior of the temple with the central image of sTon-pa-gshen-rab.

Plate IV *The Bonpo Monastery in India*



a) The Abbot Sangye Tenzin Jongdong.



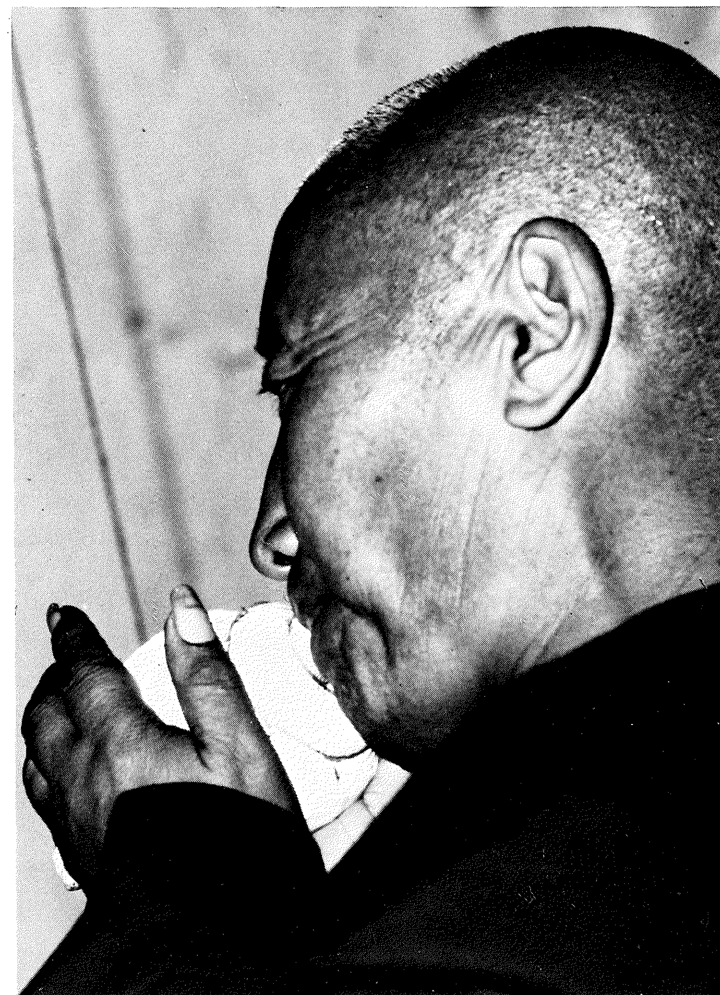
b) The Head Teacher, Tenzin Namdak.



The Corpse.



a) Playing the cymbals and the flat-bell.



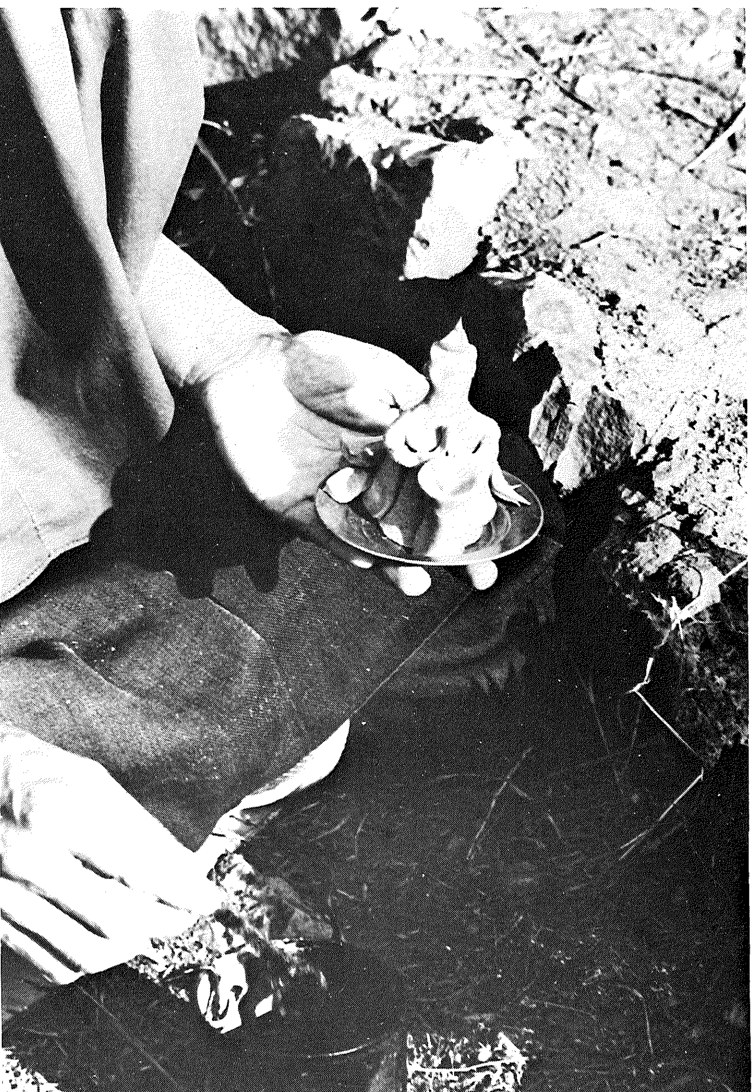
b) Blowing the conch.



Preparing the 'ransom' and offering-cakes.



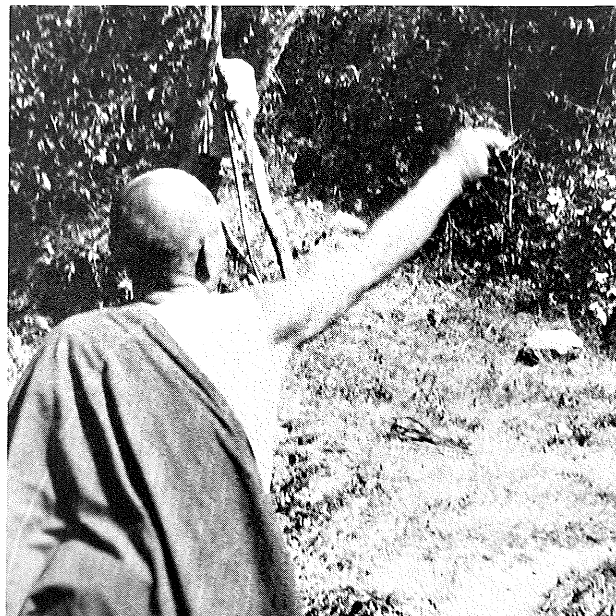
a) Painting the offering-cakes with red colour.



b) Preparing the 'ransom'.



a) The Abbot holds the 'ransom'.



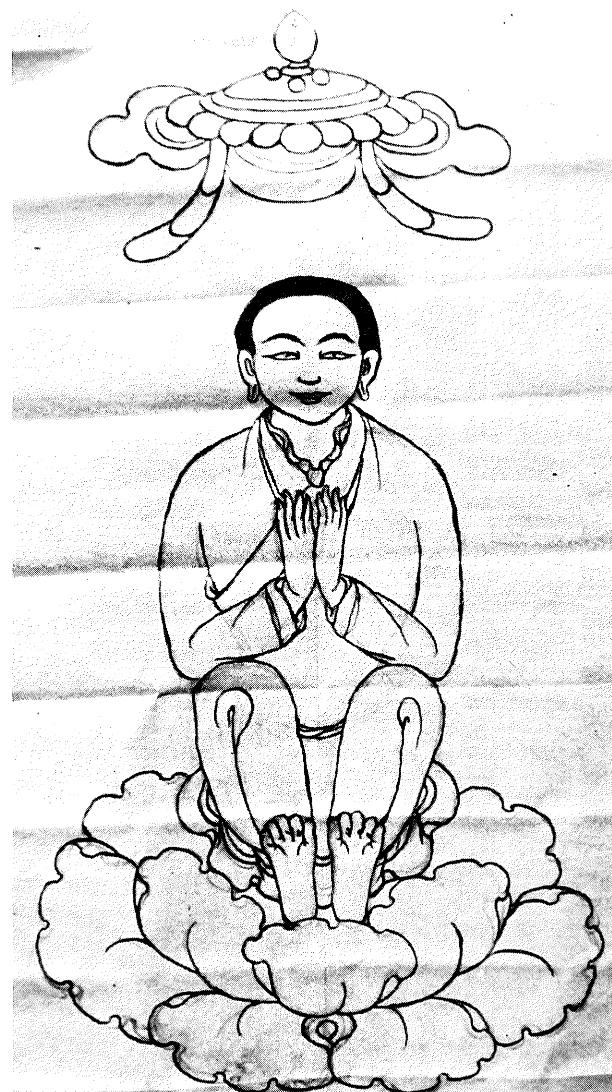
b) The 'ransom' is thrown out.



Summoning the consciousness of the deceased.



a) The Tibetan letter *A*.



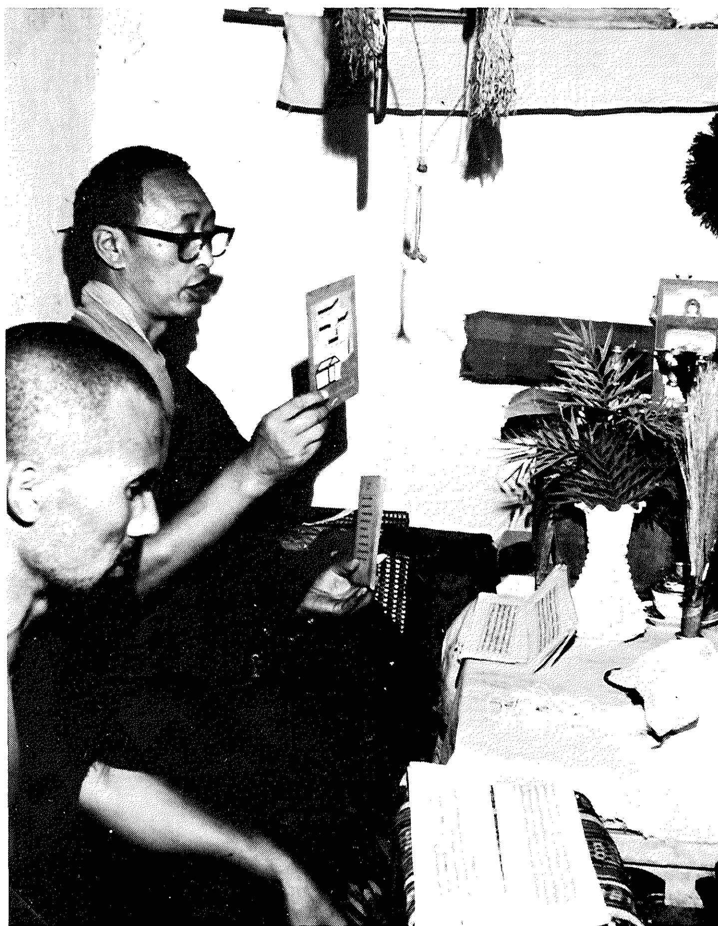
b) The drawing of the deceased to which his consciousness is summoned.



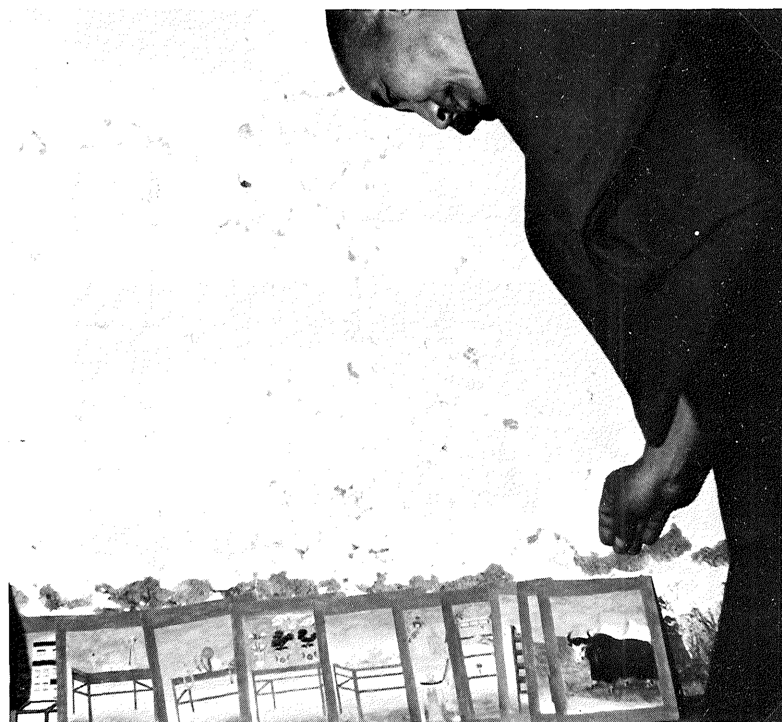
a) The Abbot summons the deceased.



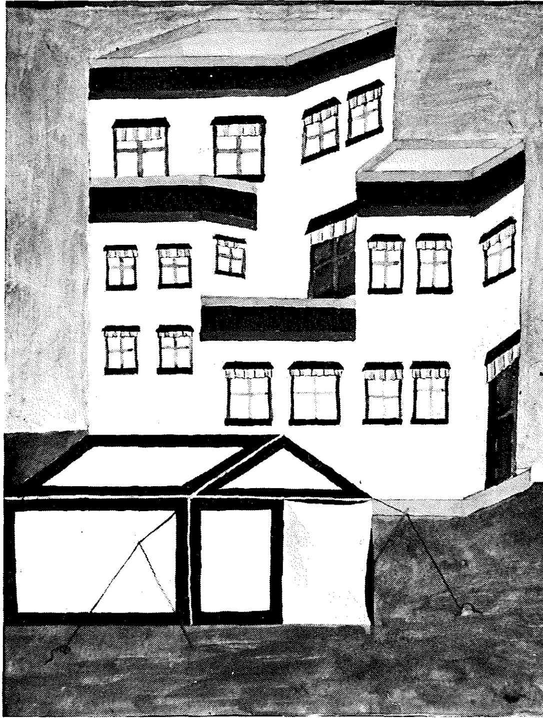
b) The effigy of the deceased is sprinkled with sanctified water.



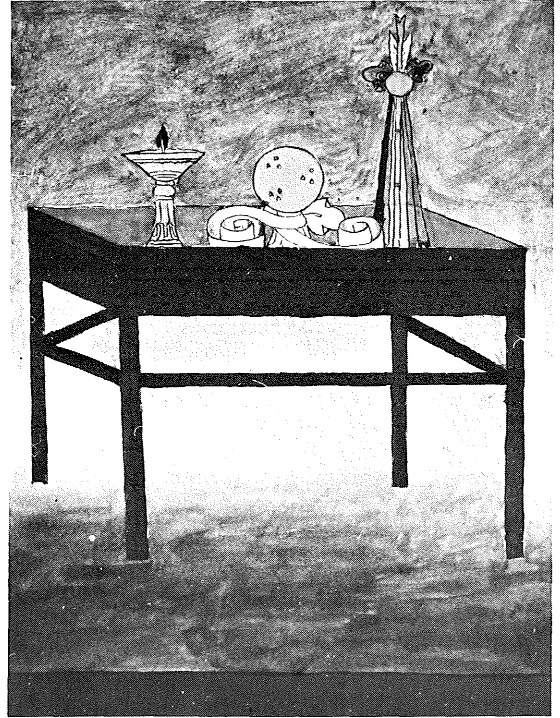
a) A ritual card is shown to the effigy of the deceased.



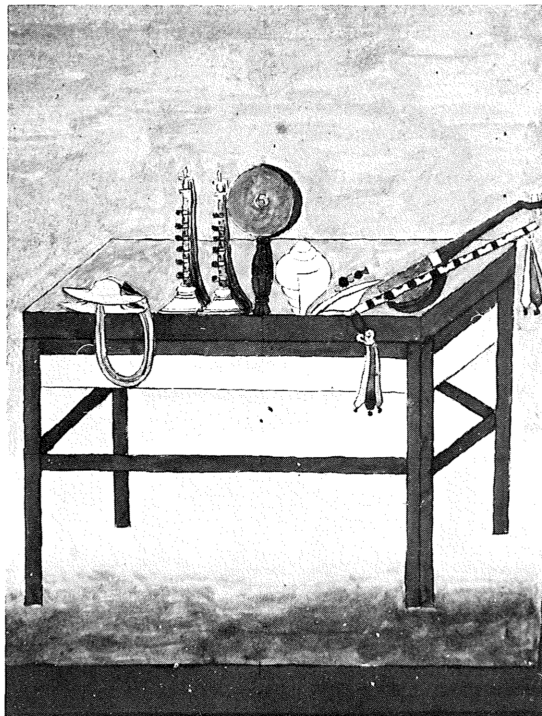
b) The ritual cards are placed in front of the effigy of the deceased.



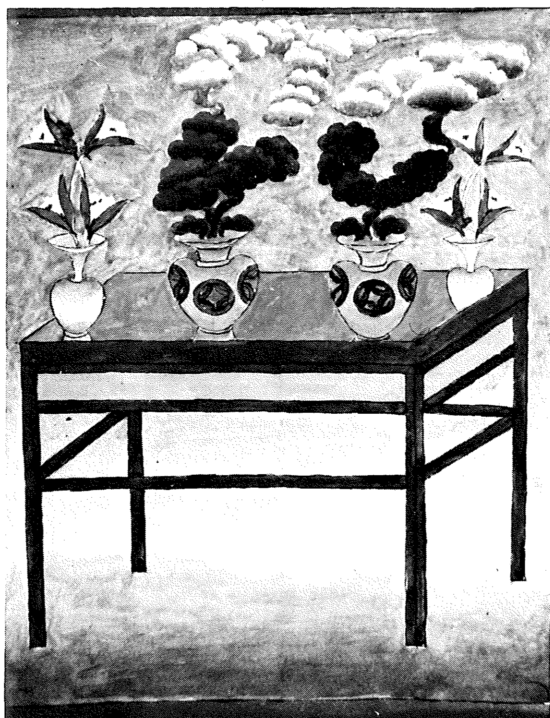
a) A dwelling for the deceased.



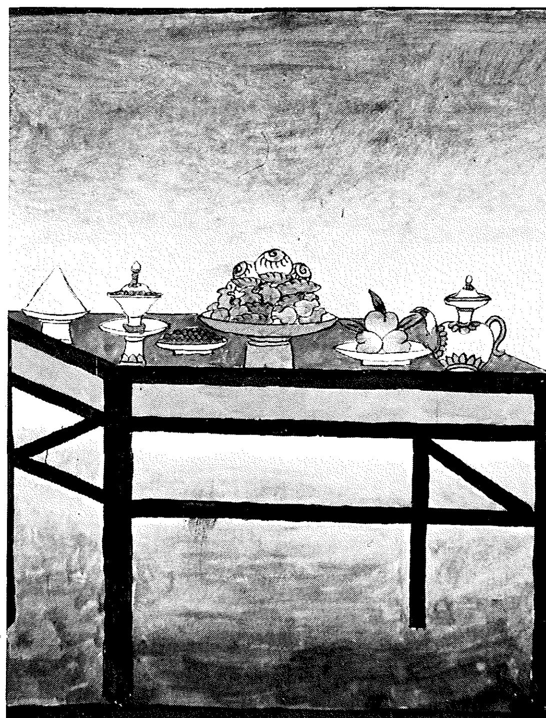
b) Offering the enjoyment of form.



c) Offering the enjoyment of sound.



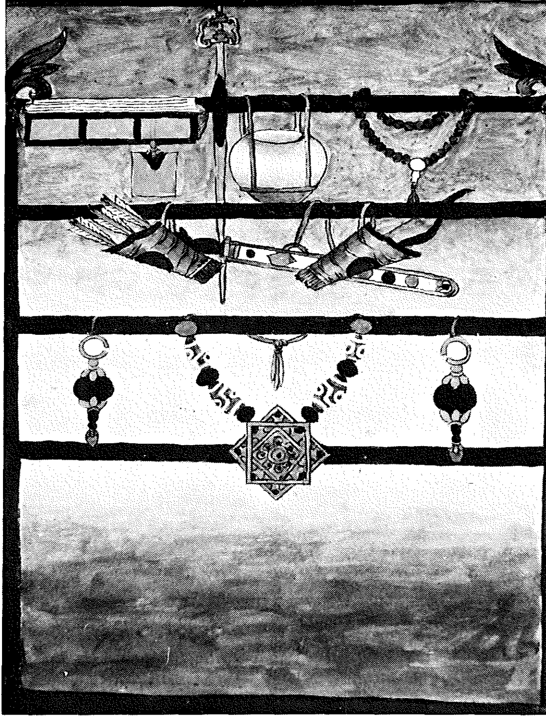
a) Offering the enjoyment of smell.



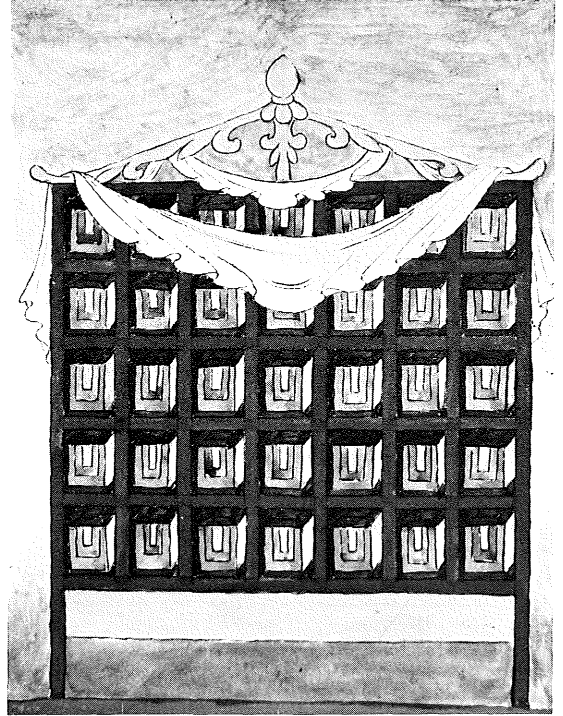
b) Offering the enjoyment of taste.



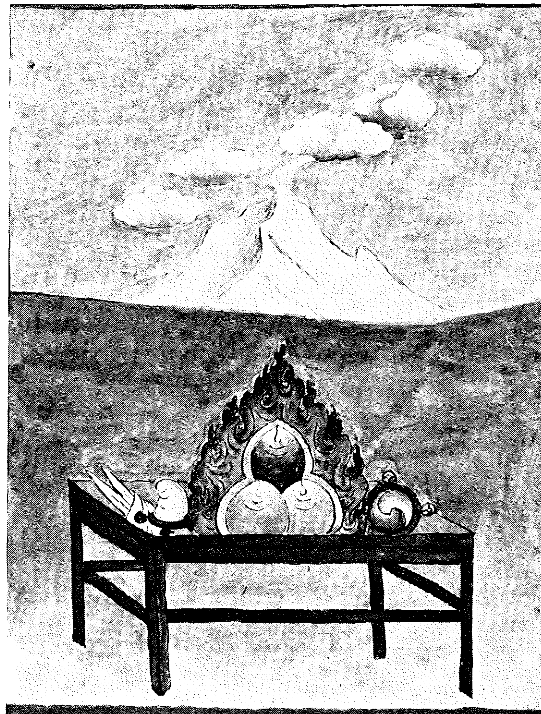
c) Offering the enjoyment of touch.



a) Offering the enjoyment of adornment.



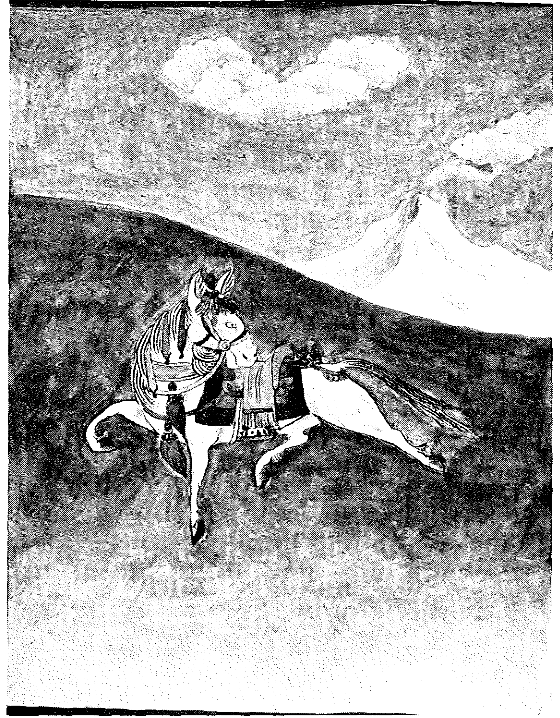
b) Offering the enjoyment of *bon*.



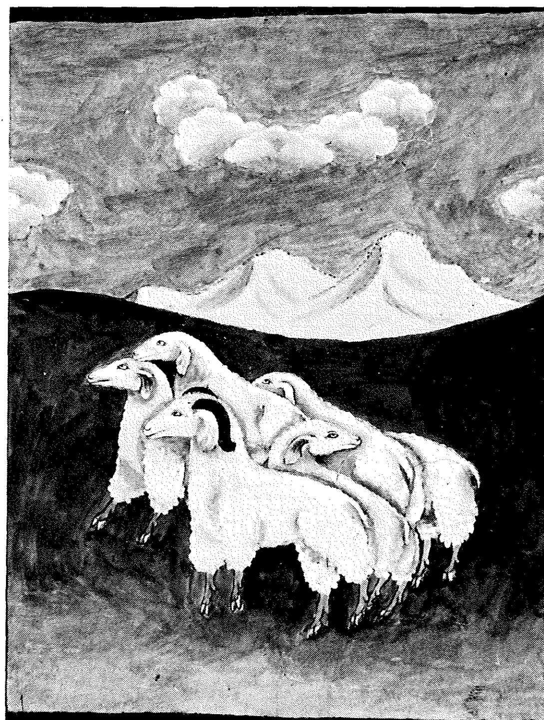
c) Offering the enjoyment of treasures.



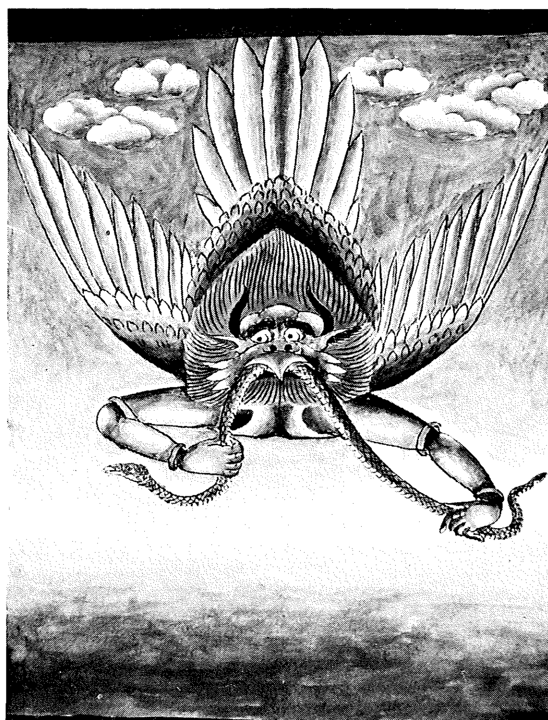
a) The divine yak, King of Knowledge.



b) The stallion of the Mind.



c) The divine sheep of Wisdom.



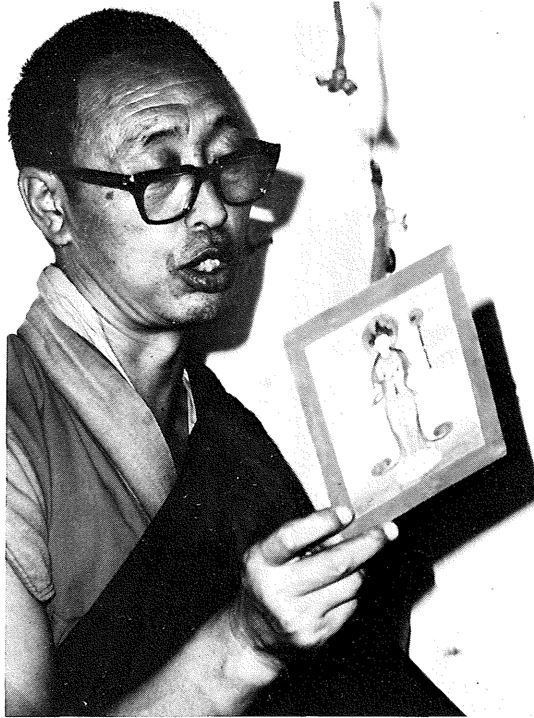
a) The *khyung*, king of View.



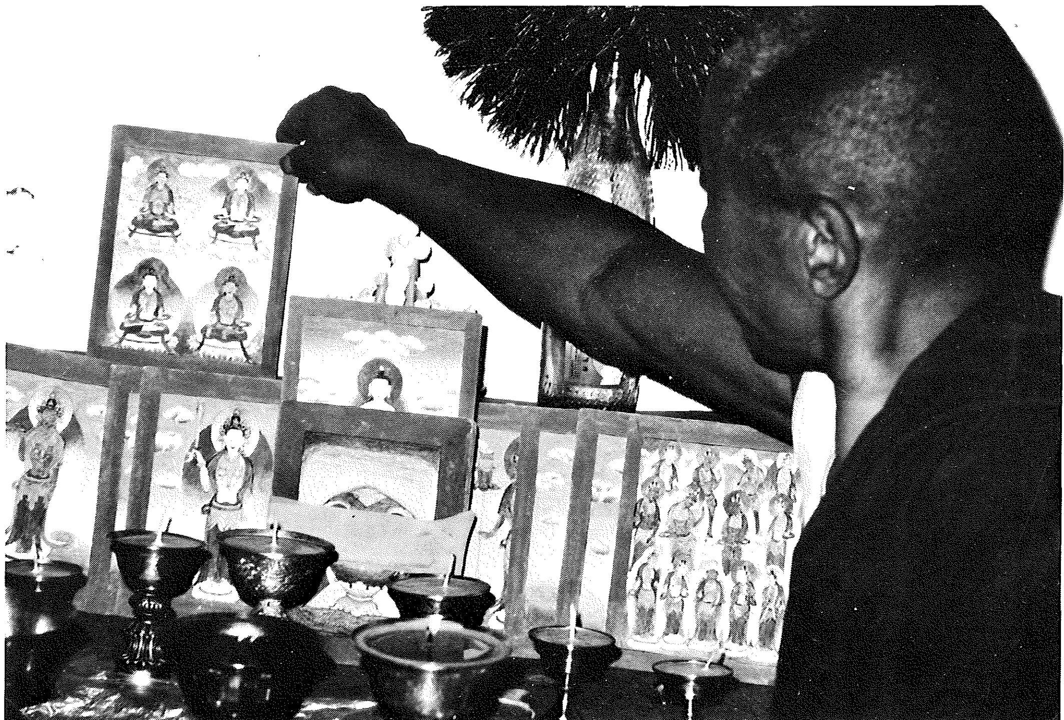
b) The dragon, king of Meditation.



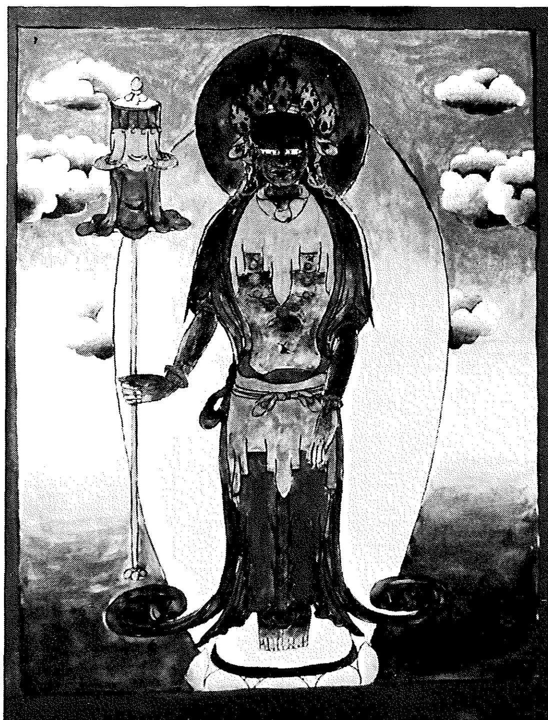
c) The lion, king of Practice.



a) A ritual card depicting a divinity is shown to the deceased.



b) A ritual card depicting divinities is placed on the altar.



a) gSang-ba-ngang-ring, the subduer of hell.



b) Mu-cho-ldem-drug, the subduer of tormented spirits.



c) Ti-sangs-rang-zhi, the subduer of animals.



a) gSang-ba-'dus-pa, the subduer of men.



b) lCe-rgyal-bar-ti, the subduer of demi-gods.



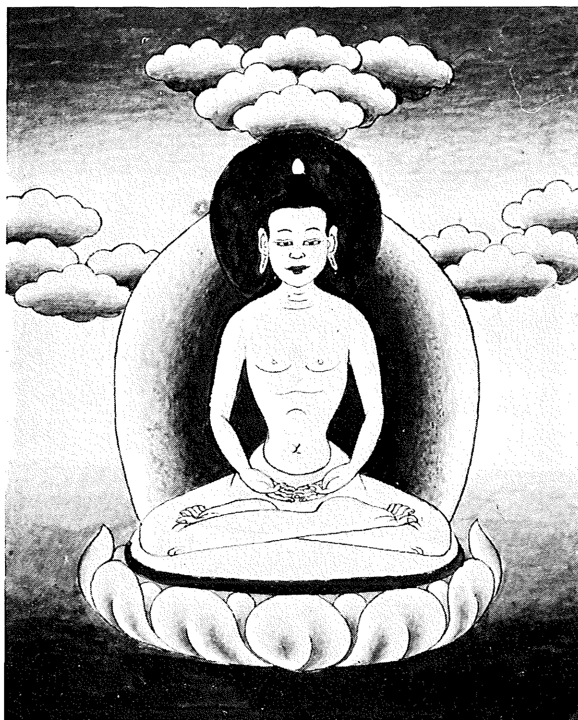
c) Ye-gshen-gtsug-phud, the subduer of gods.



a) The 'Thirteen Primeval gShen'.



b) The 'Four Chief Blessed Ones'.



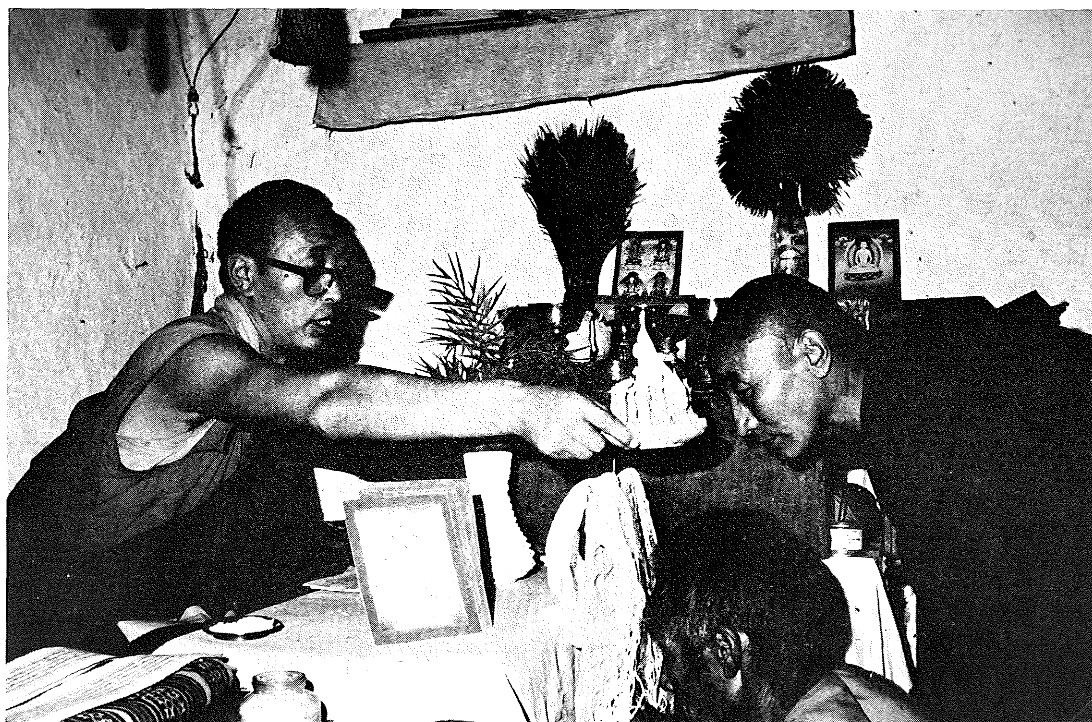
c) Kun-tu-bzang-po (the 'Primeval Buddha').



a) Offering of food is brought to the fire.



b) The burning offerings are thrown away.



a) Imparting the Consecration of the 'Offering-Cake'.



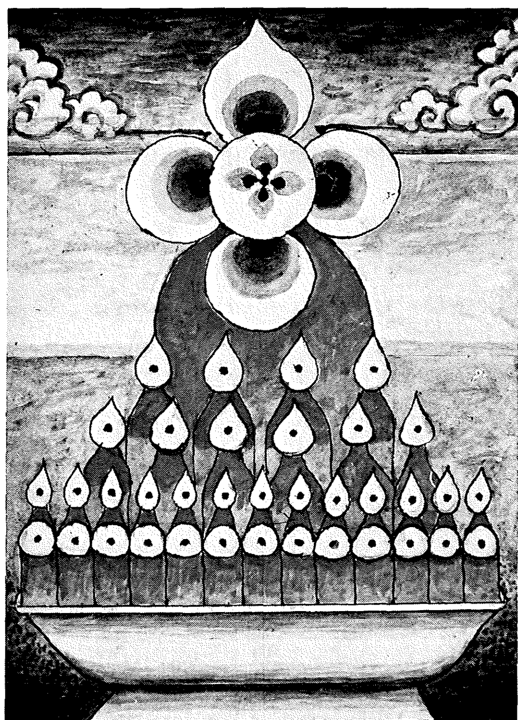
b) Imparting the Consecration of the 'Nectar-Pills'.



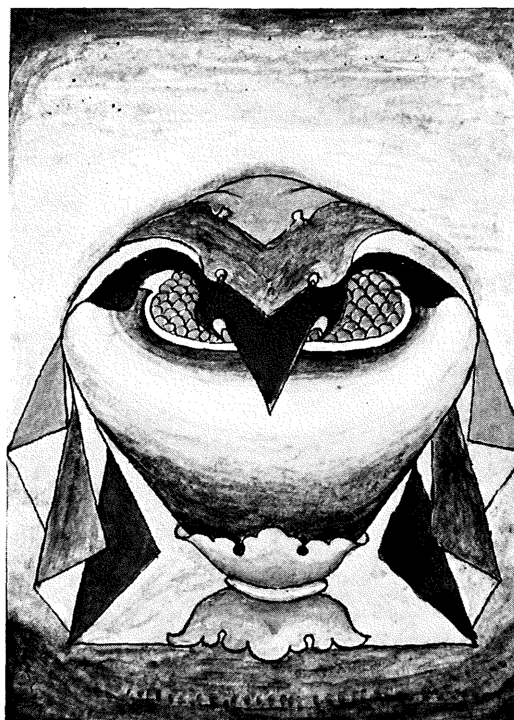
a) The Consecration of the Vase.



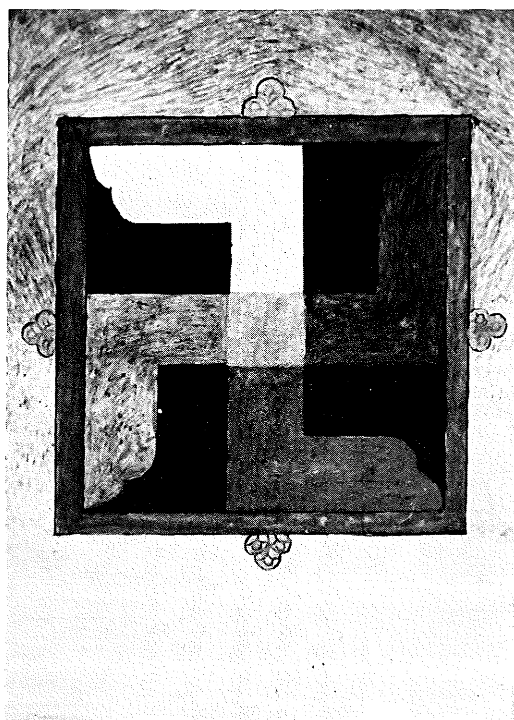
b) The 'Four Door-Keepers', invoked during the Consecration of the Root-Deities.



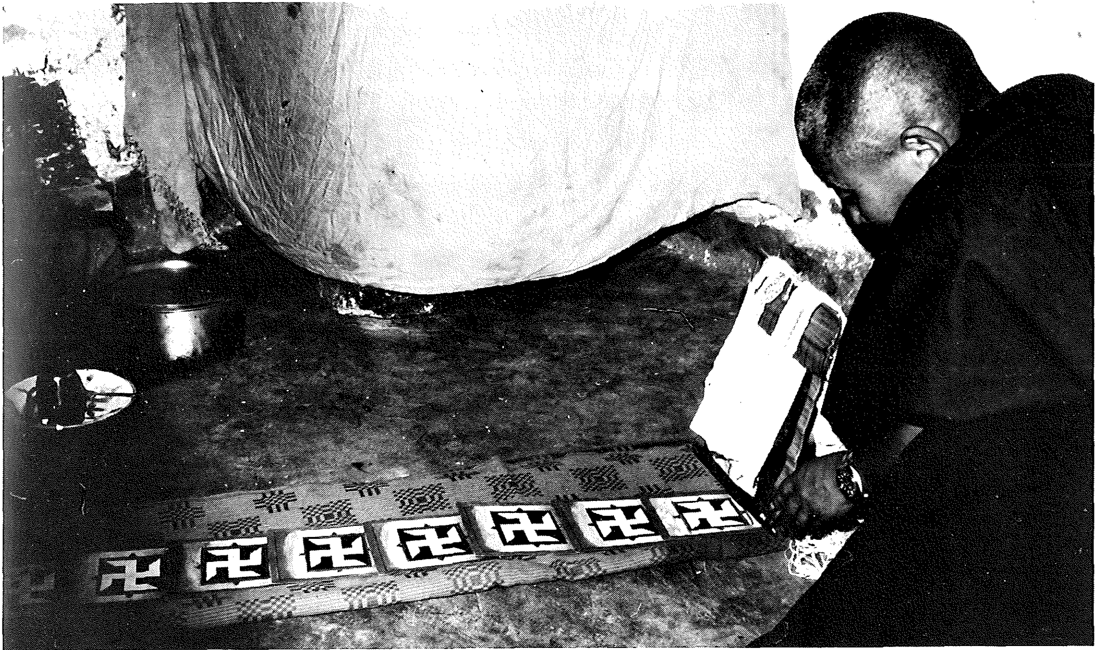
a) The Consecration of the Offering-Cake.



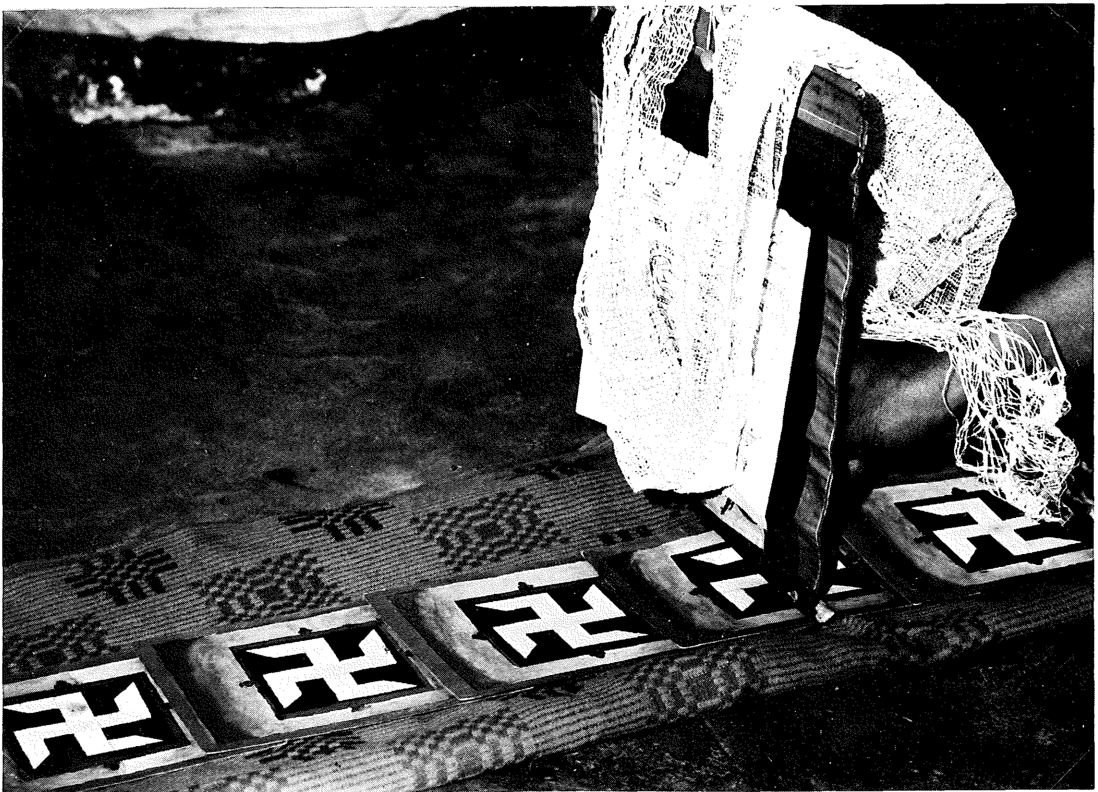
b) The Consecration of the Jewel-Pills.



c) A *g.yung-drung*, symbolizing one of the Thirteen Stages of a Spiritual Hero.



a) The effigy of the deceased is brought forward along the stages of a Spiritual Hero.



b) Detail.



a) Burning the six syllables representing the six states of rebirth.



b) Snapping of the fingers as each syllable is destroyed.



a) The Abbot enters meditation.



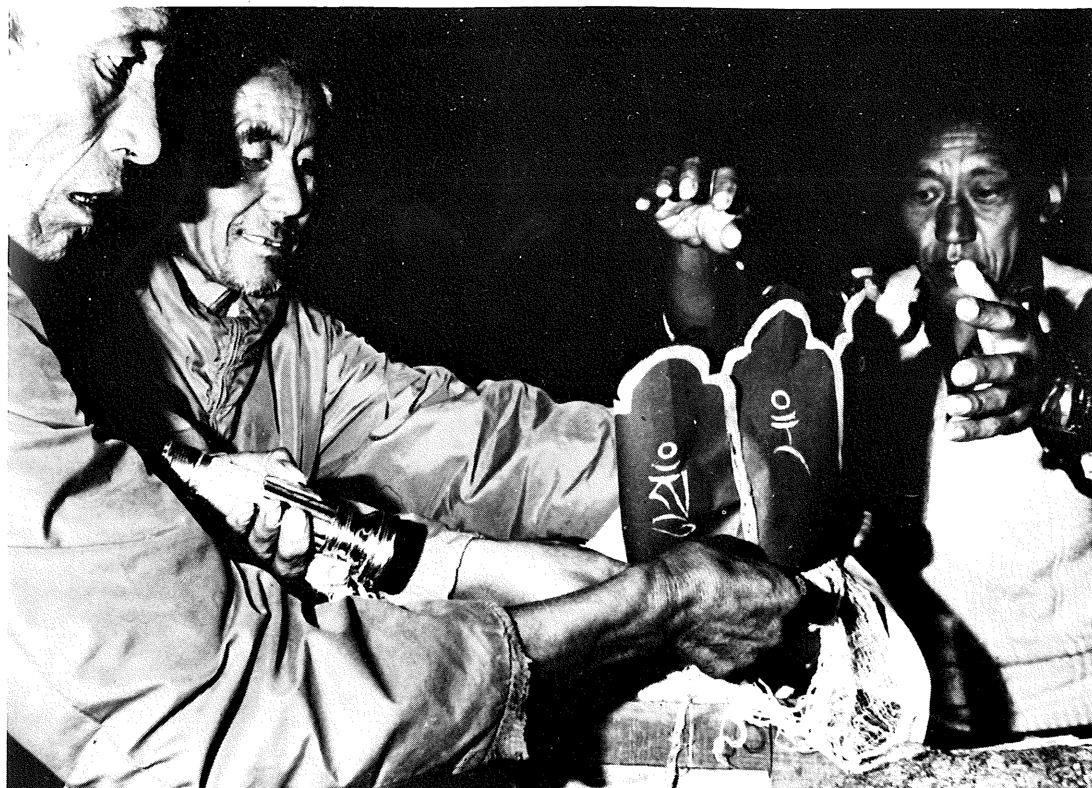
b) The drawing of the deceased is burnt.



a) The Abbot is offered lunch at the conclusion of the ritual.



b) Monks officiating at the cremation.



a) A paper crown is placed on the pyre.



b) The pyre with the tablets invoking the god of fire.



a) Candles surmounting the tablets are lit.



b) The pyre is lit.



a) Offerings are prepared.



b) Offerings are prepared.



a) Officiating monks.



b) The offerings.



a) Offerings (detail).



b) Offerings (detail).



The Funeral Shrine.



gSang-ba-ngang-ring.



Mu-cho-ldem-drug.



a) Ti-sangs-rang-zhi.



b) gSang-ba-'dus-pa.



a) lCe-rgyal-bar-ti.



b) Ye-gshen-gtsug-phud.



Nam-mkha'i-ba-dan-can.



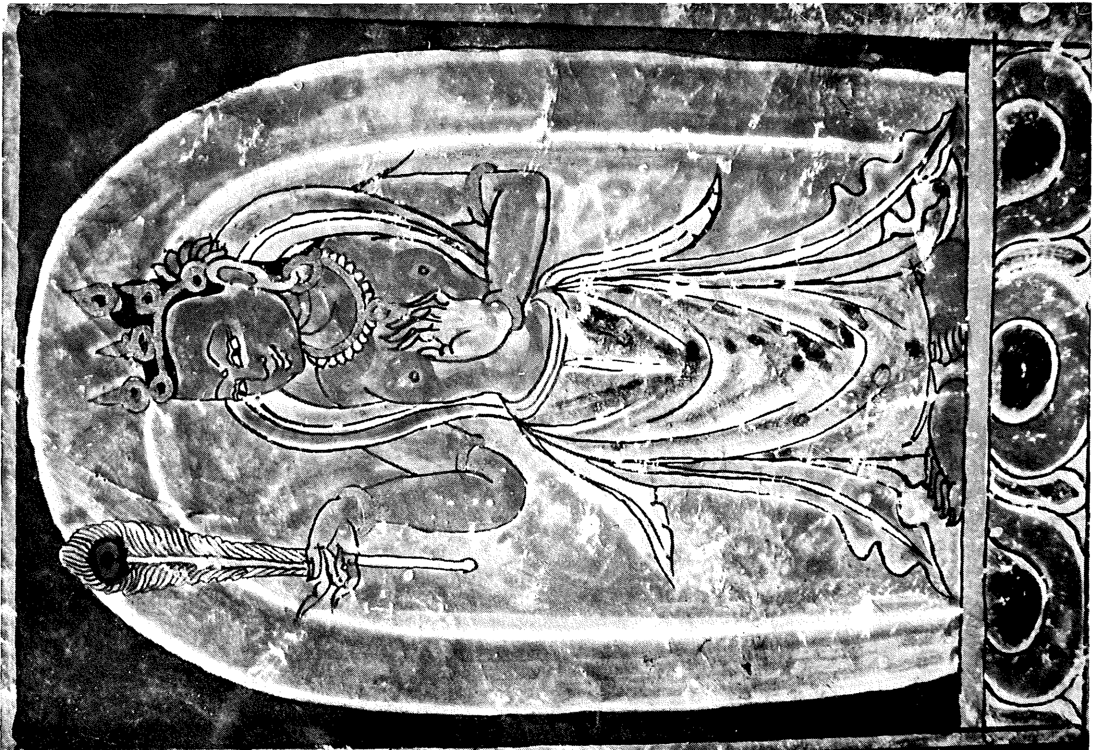
a) Khyung-gi-ru-mtshon-can.



b) rGod-kyi-'phar-'dab-can.



b) Zo-bo-spar-shad-can.



a) rMa-bya'i-ldem-rgyang-can.



b) gSas-mda'-dung-yug-can.



a) dBal-so-mdung-rtse-can.



a) rNga-stong-ri-chem-pa-can.



b) gShang-khri-lo-gnam-grags-can.



a) Dung-'phar-po-'phar-chung-can.



b) Che-rgyal-rgod-zhu-can.



a) Yang-rgyal-'brug-slag-can.



b) gCod-pa-khra-slag-can.



The Cremation Fire.